

# 女本 子ト 思ふ 田 は じや な い 嫁 か の 嫁

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ill: Hisasi

聰  
猫  
芝  
居  
Kineko shibai

And you thought there is Never a girl online?



電擊文庫



女の子 おとづれの嫁

と思つた?

聴猫芝居

Hisasi!

西村英騎／ルシアン

「もう絶対に、  
信したりしねえ  
ネットゲの女なって  
ねえ！」

ネット上の  
ルシアン  
防具至上主義の  
アーマーナイト♂。  
すごくかたい、でもチキン。

現実世界の  
西村英騎

帰宅部&趣味はゲームという、  
稀によくいるお前ら。クラスでは  
オープンオタクキャラであり、  
「こいつならオタ話OKだよな」  
的位置を占める。

Lv94 HP/17457 MP/702

Name Rusian

Job Armor Knight

Sex Male

Atk/79+229 Mat/35+49

Def/106+250 Mdf/74+5

Lv78 HP/5020 MP/1462

Name Ako  
Job Cleric  
Sex Female?

Atk/43+90 Mat/143+0  
Def/66+22 Mdf/115+18



現実世界の  
玉置亜子

ネットとリアルの区別が付かない  
コミュ障ばっちガール。  
現実世界では……といっても、  
そもそも学校にあまり  
来ない引きこもり。

ネット上のアコ

見た目至上主義の  
クレリック(♀)。  
すごくかわいい、  
でもよわい。

玉置亜子／アコ  
たま き あ  
こ

瀬川茜  
せ  
川  
あかね  
／シユヴァイン

「は、ここに程度の  
カスで俺様の  
死ぬことでも？」

ネット上での  
シユヴァイン  
火力至上主義のソードダンサー♂。  
すごくイケメン(※ただし中身はry)。

現実世界の瀬川茜

オタクとかキモいんですけど!  
とか罵っちゃう系隠れオタ。  
静まれ、俺の腕よッ……  
とばかりオタ話に  
反応する自分を抑える日々。

Lv87 HP/12077 MP/454

Name  Schwein

Job  Sword Dancer

Sex  Male?

Atk/125+276 Mat/13+56  
Def/71+101 Mdf/39+10

# 御聖院杏／アプリコット

「課金の方が  
強いではな  
いか、  
他は必要ないだ  
う！」

ネット上での  
アプリコット

課金至上主義の  
魔法使い♂。  
すごく強い……  
けどこれ反則じゃね？

Lv94 HP/13930 MP/5684

Name Apricot

Job Law Wizard

Sex Male?

Atk/73+150 Mat/470+360×1.8  
Def/86+278 Mdf/252+30

## 現実世界の御聖院杏

理事の娘で生徒会長という  
ハイスペックを誇るお嬢様。  
勘違い系の両親のもと、  
権力とか金遣いとか  
色々勘違いした結果がこれだよ！

「ああ……  
あああああ……!!」



「うわー、ハヨアンだ!  
本当にハヨアンですよー!!

「ふるしあん……？  
西村……よね？」

ギルド「アレイキヤツツ」  
第一回オフ会集合場所にて

「わむ、無事に全員が  
揃ったようだな」

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*And you thought  
there is Never  
a girl online?*

DESIGNED BY AFTERGROW



Kineko shibai  
**聴猫芝居**

illust  
**Hisasi**



## Uncharted Regrets online

*Our naive protagonist proposed to a female character in an online game, only to find out that this player is actually a guy.*

*Traumatized by that, he decided to never trust a girl online, but now, two years later, a female player is proposing to him. What will happen?—Manga-Updates*

Translation of Netoge no Yome wa Onnanoko ja nai to Omotta?’s volume 1, prologue.

Translation and localization notes are available at the bottom, but try to finish the chapter before that.

□ Rusian: Please marry me!

□ Nekohime: F-Funya?

Kneeling down, the blonde man with a gigantic sword on his back extended his hand towards a girl with cat ears on her head.

The scene, displayed in sleek 3D graphics, was solemn, holy, and sacred; possessing beauty that could belong on a piece of art—or so I thought back then.

“I told her, I really told her...”

Looking at my own chat shown on the screen, I tightly gripped my trembling hands.

There exists a game called Legendary Age, shortform, LA.

A PC-exclusive massively multiplayer online role-playing game—one among many MMORPGs where many connect to a single virtual world and engage in a role-playing game at the

same time. It had only been a year since LA released, but its decent action elements and cute graphics gathered quite a number of players, making it a medium player in the MMORPG scene.

Having started my online game experience with this game, I was totally hooked onto the unique enjoyment brought about by the actual, living people around unlike in offline games which have only NPCs. To the extent that I continued playing ever since it was released and even developed the idea that sleep was a waste of time.

And a major update came to that LA as it celebrated its one year anniversary.

The key new feature was the “Marriage System”.

Propose to a player character of another sex and you can carry out a marriage ceremony if it’s accepted. Apparently, the couple will be treated as husband and wife after marriage, granting various bonuses, such as bonus stats when together and the ability to know each other’s locations.

□ Nekohime: Marry... you mean, with me, nya?

□ Rusian: Yes, please, Nekohime-san!

On the first day it was implemented.

She was the prettiest and cutest in the guild I belonged to, and paid attention to her comrades too. Not to mention her good fashion sense and intelligence. In addition, she had skill as a player and above all that, her unfaltering addition of “nya ☆” at the end of her sentences truly made her the ideal woman; I

proposed to that idol of the guild, in both name and reality, Nekohime-san.

Immediately after the maintenance on the day of the update, I proposed to Nekohime-san, there and then, upon logging in at the same time by coincidence. Before anyone else; no rivals were here. The perfect timing that would never come again.

□ Nekohime: Nya, nwhy me? It's not a joke, is it, nya? You are really, really asking me, nya?

□ Rusian: I'm serious! I love you!

“Please, please...!”

Nekohime-san and I would live happily ever after as a married couple if she gave the OK.

I could play the game, monopolizing the love from the angel loved by everyone, Nekohime-san—aah, what a dream it would be.

I might be rejected. Of course, I wasn't entirely confident.

But I believed Nekohime-san was closer to me than anyone else and I thought of her so much I couldn't hold myself back any longer.

I would hold no grudge against her even if I was rejected. I was that determined. I confessed, fully prepared for the consequences.

So—

□ Nekohime: Ah, sorry. I'm a guy in RL.

“.....Huh?”

My mouth hung open before my monitor the moment those words were displayed.

Guy... a guy?

My angel, Nekohime-san?

Eh, what's that supposed to mean?

Some kind of joke?

Ah, that's it, it's a joke.

Hahaha, you're such an imp, Nekohime-san.

□ Rusian: S-Stop that, Nekohime-san, that's a terrible joke.

□ Nekohime: No, seriously.

The reply that greeted me as I typed mine with trembling hands was filled with words so cold that they couldn't have been from Nekohime-san.

□ Nekohime: Sorry, but seriously, I'm a guy. Like, an old guy. I started playing as a girl on a little whim, and made it real obvious, but I never thought I would get a serious proposal. Sorry about that.

□ Rusian: W-What are you saying...

I tried to deny it, but no words came to mind as the words in the chat from Nekohime-san were too unlike her.

□ Nekohime: No, really, I'm sorry, honestly.

□ Rusian: Y-You're really a guy?

□ Nekohime: Yup, really a guy in RL.

□ Rusian: And an old guy at that?

□ Nekohime: Yup, yup, an old guy in RL.

“N-No way...”

My shoulders fell as I fell into utter despair.

That Nekohime-san who was practically my first crush was actually a guy—and an old one—how could such a ridiculous thing be possible?

No, it couldn't be true.

It couldn't possibly be true. Definitely.

That's it, Nekohime-san didn't want to marry me, so she's lying to reject me without hurting me. That's possible for the kind girl that she—

□ Nekohime: Or rather, isn't it real obvious that an actual girl would never say something like “nya ☆”?

“W-Wa-Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

I screamed out in despair and I slammed against the keyboard.

□ Rusian: kuawsedrftgyfujiko-p

“That bastard, damn it, shit! You fake! How dare you betray me!”

Perhaps reacting to my random and senseless keypresses, LA ended forcibly. Without even noticing that, my tears seriously flowed as I slammed the keyboard again and again.

“Damnit, damnit! I'm never, never!

Several keys separated and fluttered into the air the instant I strongly struck the keyboard with a clunk.

“Never going to believe a girl in an online game ever agaaaaain!”

That was roughly two years ago.

My spine still freezes up now whenever I think about it, that's how horrifying a memory it is.

□ Rusian: —And that's what happened.

□ Ako: Really? I see. There really are some terrible people around, how could anyone think of becoming a girl in a game?

□ Rusian: I was such a newbie back then...

I concluded, after recounting my long tale.

I think that should have gotten my point across to the girl before my eyes—no, to be accurate, the girl character before my character's eyes.

□ Rusian: And that's how it is.

□ Ako: Okay! By all means! Please marry me!

□ Rusian: Were you actually listening to my story!?

□ Ako: How can I help but ask after listening to all of it!

□ Rusian: How did it lead to that!

□ Ako: it's utterly more obviously clear that you will have more fun after marrying me!

□ Rusian: I don't know where you're getting your confidence, but anyway, I said no!

□ Ako: So when should we marry? —Now, of course!

□ Rusian: Don't you now me! Listen!

This is mostly how that was, a story about “mai waifu” and me.

#### **Localization / Translation Notes**

##### **“RL”**

Real life. ([more info](#))

##### **“Uncharted Regrets Online”**

From “Uncharted Waters Online”.

I want a better name for this, any suggestions?

Something related to “Uncharted Waters” and “Regret”. ([more info](#))

##### **“—Now, of course!”**

「今でしょ」 originates from a TV commercial for a cram school.

([more info](#))

##### **“Burontism”**

The following line(s) / phrase(s) originate from a FFXI player named “Buront”.

“it's utterly more obviously clear that you will have more fun after marrying me!” ([more info](#))

## **Shin Offline Meeting: Imagine**

Translation of Netoge no Yome wa Onnanoko ja nai to Omotta?’s volume 1, chapter 1.

Translation and localization notes are available at the bottom, but try to finish the chapter before that.

There's a schoolwide morning assembly, once a month, in the Prefectural Maegasaki High School I attend.

While waiting for the assembly to start at the gym, I call out to my friend lined up beside me.

“Announcement: Mr. Me has finally gotten a wife.”

“Oh, how many has it been this year, Nishimura?”

My classmate replies with an exasperated look.

Nishimura is my name in RL.

No, I mean, it's just my name, that real life bit wasn't necessary.

Don't people develop a habit for attaching “in RL” for things in reality after sinking too far into the Internet?

“Oh c'mon, listen, you'll be shocked, she's the first.”

“Stop with the obvious lies, you change wives every three months.”

I tried saying so seriously but was mercilessly rejected.

Erm, how about waiting a second before that reply?

You didn't have to be that blunt, did you?

“No other reaction from you? You're really married?! Like that.”

“Nope.”

“My heart will stop beating from shock if you get a girl, though.”

“I’ll be totally shocked even if you call me up to tell me you got married twenty years later.”

“I can’t deny at all, but isn’t there a nicer way to put that?!”

And my other classmates even joined in with those pretty horrible remarks.

One of them frowns with a puzzled look.

“What’s that supposed to be, anyway, that wife thing.”

“The wives this guy talks about are just the characters he likes.”

“Yep, yep, that ‘mai waifu’ thing.”

“Woah, gross.”

“Stop it! You’re hurting me all the more saying that deadpan!”

I hold my head and go through my exaggerated damaged motions.

That said, getting hurt is just an act. It’s not actually that much of a shock.

This is, well, a variant of a sort of worldly wisdom.

Everyone in a typical class in school has something like a “character”, don’t they.

The *sportsman* from the sports clubs; the *bandman* who knows lots about music; the *class president* type with good grades; the *delinquents* who are a little vulgar; people like those.

But my grades are average among the average, I belong to the Home-Going club, and my hobby’s online gaming. An ordinary

high school boy without a single element essential to the socially apt normalfag.

I figured I would put in some effort and try creating a character to survive in the class and as a result—

“Nishimura, you’re seriously such a geek...”

“I’m enjoying life in my own little way, get off my case.”

“Well, introduce me to this waifu of yours next time.”

“He’ll have to find a way to get her out from his monitor first.”

Yes, I became an open geek.

But you see, it’s unexpectedly fun. The geek’s a vital character, so I’m getting along in the class without any need to hold myself back.

That’s right, for example.

“Oh, right, Nishimura, I heard that Jumbo Satou comedian’s doing a live broadcast online, that’s for real?”

“Aah, yep, it’s real. It was on yesterday too.”

“No way, was it good?”

“You would know if you heard it yourself, but it was super boring.”

“Right?! I knew it!”

It seems my existence is irreplaceable for topics like this.

An open geek fulfils the need of “if you want to talk about that topic, talk to this guy”.

A person fine with geeky stuff, someone able to provide that sense of ease.

On the conversation about live broadcasts over the Internet, my classmates continue on, relieved, maybe due to how I naturally replied with a “I saw it”.

“That guy’s only good for that quip of his, right?”

“Yeah, yeah, he gives the same response to everything. That’s jumbo! That’s the one.”

“Must have been a flood of comments there.”

“But it’s scary how it just works out sometimes despite him having no more than that.”

And my other classmates jump onto the conversation. They definitely watched the live broadcast themselves, anyway.

But to avoid getting labelled as a geek by saying anything like that, they intentionally run the conversation through me.

After all, as long as they’re talking to me, proclaiming all things geeky, they will be pardoned from all such talk.

With the excuse that they’re following my lead since I have nothing else to talk about.

“Who cares about some comedian with only one good quip. Aah, I want a girl.”

“Stop it with the tearjerkers, you.”

“If a wife counts, I have one.”

“Stop it with the tearjerkers, Nishimura.”

Of course, normal topics mix in like this too.

There's no need to hide myself away and there are countless topics in the subculture. Even if I can't follow along with the normalfag stuff, it's fine, that's my character.

I personally think I've carved out a pretty nice spot for myself. My one and only problem——would be the looks I get from the girls, maybe.

“Disgusting...”

And that voice came from diagonally behind us.

“And there they go again with the gross conversations. Geeks are so disgusting. Don't get any closer to us, seriously.”

I turn my head and there they are, the girls of my class glaring at me with their cold gazes.

The role of the open geek comes with the sporadic calls of “gross” and “annoying” as one may expect. It is a little annoying, but that's a normal high school girl for you.

That girl's named Segawa Whatshername if I'm not wrong.

“What is it, Segawa, don't lump all the geeks together and call them disgusting. There are fancy geeks around the world like those knowledgeable in wine or flowers, you're being rude to them.”

Segawa's eyes narrowed even further after I answered out of formality.

“Or rather, you're the disgusting one, Nishimura.”

“I can't deny that at all, so stop it!”

“Aah, Nishimura, how sad. Truth hurts, doesn't it.”

“We know you really are disgusting, but she didn’t have to point out just how disgusting you are, did she?”

“You guys are way worse!”

Well, that’s how it is, I’ll never get a girlfriend or anything.

I’ve gave up myself, honestly. I just need my games, that’s all.

“Still, if she were to just hold back her words, Segawa would be so cute.”

“You heard? Maeda who sits besides her apparently confessed and blew up.”

“Man, what a hero.”

“He’s pretty geeky himself. That’s right, Segawa’s your type, right, Nishimura? See, her face isn’t that bad, she’s petite, and her hair’s even in twin tails.”

My classmates’ whispers prompt me to turn my sight towards the girl from earlier.

“Nn, it’ll be fine if she’s a tsundere, but she’s all tsun... wah...”

My eyes meet with two eyes filled with a truly intense desire to murder.

“...You really do have a death wish, don’t you?”

“I’m so very sorry!”

“F-Forgive Nishimura, please! His only crime is his love for twin tails!”

“So disgusting... can you simply stop breathing in the same air I am?”

“That hurts!”

There's no need to go that far, is there?!

My body jerks and my shoulder knocks into a girl from the next class.

“Kyaa...”

“Ah, sorry. You okay?”

“Ah, no, I'm...”

The girl draws back as though afraid and shakes her head from side to side. I can't really tell with her long fringe and how she still looks downwards despite that, but it seems she's really scared.

Are geeks that scary?

I guess they are, I'm so sorry for existing near you.

Well, that's generally how society looks at them.

“The assembly's starting soon, okay, everyone, quiet dooown.”

The teacher in charge lazily speaks from the front of the class. A female teacher in her early twenties and unmarried. I won't make any comments on her lack of drive despite her youth, but she, Saitou-sensei, is a perfectly ordinary Japanese Language teacher. Replying with a careless “okay”, the class begins quietening down.

[Good morning, everyone. I am Goshouin, your president. We will now begin the schoolwide assembly.]



And thus, the student council president's calm voice rang out and began the assembly. Absentmindedly gazing at the president whose beautiful features and confident demeanor got her selected or so the rumours say, I let out a small breath.

Seriously now, I just don't have any luck with girls in real life. Seriously, for real, none whatsoever.

But, but still.

The fact that I have a wife is real, through and through.

+++ +++ +++

Calmly looking at the life point bar floating atop my character name, [Rusian], dropping, I operate the keyboard at a comfortable pace.

I hear the groans from monsters overlap each other from the headphones over my ears.

The character I control, Rusian, is running through the far depths of a dungeon with all his might.

Not by himself. With enough monsters pulled along behind him to cover up the screen.

“Aah, damn... this is so annoying.”

One of the monsters stops in its track when I left its detection range as I continue running.

I get it back after circling around the mob of enemies, but that process shaves off more of my life and the bar decreases once again.

Normally, this playstyle would hardly need any effort and I would never make a mistake at a place like this.

But it's been a stream of mistakes ever since earlier. It would be nice returning to my allies with at least eighty percent of my life remaining, but half of it's already gone. I'm definitely not concentrating hard enough.

And I know why.

It's the conversation between my guild members, surging through the chat window at the bottom of the screen.

I blame it all on that. It's not my fault. I'm not the one at fault.

□ Ako: And then I got Rusian to come with me to where we first met and confessed there.

□ Apricot: Finally, huh. I kept wondering when it'll finally happen, but I never thought you would be the one doing it, Ako.

□ Schwein: Could you two take any longer? Man, he's such a sissy, lol.

□ Ako: But then Rusian refused me once...

□ Apricot: Seriously? You mean he said no to your confession, Ako? Is he mentally ill or something similar?

□ Schwein: Hmph, someone on my level would never do that in his position, lol. Can that idiot get any more stupid, lol?

□ Ako: Unspeakable grief beyond my wildest imagination assailed me there...

“These guys...”

Maybe I should just beat down those people mouthing off all they like along with this clump of enemies.

I run at full speed with those dark thoughts towards my allies. Not to kill off the monsters but to stop the chat.

□ Ako: But Rusian then went like “You don’t have to waste your money on something like that.” when I was going to get ready the enchantments for the ring, but after he said that, the ring he gave me cost around 20m and boosted every resistance.

“Uoowaaaaahh, hurrrrryy!”

I run within sight of my allies with all my speed before she reveals any more.

My character that used a huge sword in the past now holds the opposite, a huge shield, and begins taking on the enemies’ attacks.

□ Rusian: C’mom, food’s served, people!

The attacks flood in as I stand still. The life I recovered on the way is scraped off in an instant too, with the bar’s color turning from green to yellow.

□ Schwein: That grumpy guy acted like all that but he was still all for it, huh, lolol.

□ Apricot: A male tsundere is good in its own way, huh.

□ Rusian: Don’t chat when someone lured a mob of monsters for you! C’mom, take them, Schw!

Look at me, aren’t I getting whacked here?! I’ll die, you know?!

□ Schwein: I don't wanna hear that from you, grumpy hubby, lol.

That message appeared and my comrade with his large sword, Schw—officially, Schwein—started showering the enemies with attacks.

□ Rusian: How about I sic all of these enemies onto you, you bastard.

□ Schwein: Hah, you think these small fries alone can kill this great Schwein?

Why are you acting so big, you wouldn't even survive with just half of them on you.

□ Ako: Welcome back, Rusian.

And “mai waifu”, Ako the cleric happily calls out to me.

No, hey, you're the healer. That's not a job with enough free time to relax and type in the chat during a battle.

□ Rusian: That doesn't matter, heal! Heal, Ako!

I desperately whittle down the enemies, pissed off at my utterly laid-back comrades.

But the bar floating on top of my character continues to be chipped off at a rapid pace.

Passing by yellow, the signal that my life is less than half, it turns to red.

“Hey, hey, hey, heal, c'mon, heal!”

A critical health mark goes up on top of Rusian who I control. He's at the end of his rope.

□ Ako: Sorry, Rusian, I'll be on it right away, so give me a moment!

“How many skills could you have used in the time you spent typing that!”

Several seconds pass as I continue, annoyed, and a rich green effect lit up on the screen.

The healing skill worked fine.

—Right in the middle of the mob of enemies.

□ Rusian: The heck are you doing?!

□ Ako: S-sorry, Rusian!

Then control your character instead of typing that!

Just as I resigned myself to death, a speech bubble appeared on the robed male character standing behind Ako.

□ Apricot: Hahaha, there's no need to worry. Behold, this is the power of a staff enhanced with a hundred and fifty thousand yen of cash along with the one-use cash magic booster with a price tag of three hundred yen each that comes with an extra one when you buy them as a set of ten!

□ Rusian: What's with those cash items that are totally exploiting the users?!

That's such a waste! Stop it!

Though that thought did come to mind, the magic activated without any chance to stop it.

An explosion with a special effect, unique to cash items, more impressive than the usual ones, a grand sound effect, and an absurd amount of damage assails the screen.

- Ako: Amazing, Master, the monsters are like trash!
- Apricot: Ha-ha-ha, this is the power of the legendary staff!

Or the power of money; that's one nasty legend.

But with cash items adding even more power onto the cash staff that had enough firepower on its own, the meteorites crashing down onto the field magnificently crush the mob of monsters.

- Apricot: Fu-fu-fu, there's no feeling better in this game than knowing that you can one-hit kill.
- Rusian: Woah, you can one-hit kill the monsters here?

Knowing how many attacks to kill an enemy, regardless of the RNG, was a factor in maximizing the efficiency of hunting monsters, all the more so if it only took one hit.

But it's no ordinary feat to achieve that in a hunting ground of a decent difficulty.

He, Apricot-shi, the master of my guild, "Alley Cats", is in a class of his own as a heavy cash spending warrior, surpassing even those people in the hardcore guilds.

Honestly, my heart hurts just witnessing it. It's not my money dropping, but it still hurts as though I'm the one losing it.

□ Apricot: Naturally. Cash items aren't just for show. Get it through your head, each of those meteorites earlier had thirty sticks of *umaibou* in it.

□ Rusian: Thirty sticks with each costing ten yen...

□ Schwein: So that barrage earlier's worth more than Rusian? lol

□ Rusian: I'm not that cheap, am I?

A green light envelops my character while we speak.

The long-awaited healing magic's effect. My life bar safely returns to green.

□ Ako: I'm sorry, I got delayed since I was talking.

A female character wearing white clothes and bowing her head repeatedly. My wife, Ako.

It's all good since I didn't die in the end, but she just isn't improving much. Despite how it's been almost a year since she started the game.

□ Rusian: Before that, how about not focusing on the chat while we're hunting?

□ Schwein: It would be a great loss if I'm the one dying, but who cares about Rusian?

□ Apricot: Shouldn't you show your forgiving side as a good husband? Try letting her take her time the next time.

Ako's character gladly claps her hands together at the irresponsible words from the pair.

□ Ako: I see. Then, Rusian, take it easy!

□ Rusian: Don't take it easy! Be quick with the heals!

Aah, seriously, geez.

It would be so much more relaxing with a somewhat decent healer.

□ Schwein: Hey, Rusian, dontcha think using those words on your own wife's going too far?

□ Apricot: Indeed, this would count as domestic.

□ Rusian: I'm the one suffering here! Also, domestic just refers to things related to a household!

And I'm even getting told off like this by becoming a little angry! They're going too easy on her just because we're married!

□ Rusian: Anyway, I'll be bringing in the enemies a few more times later. Ako, you don't have to try too hard, just keep me alive, please.

□ Ako: Okaaaay, I'll try my best.

Ako happily answered.

Right before I left, a light '*pikon*♪' sounded out with my chat window opening.

□ Ako: Thanks, Rusian.

Along with another line.

□ Ako: I love you.

In short, I couldn't refuse.

I can't marry anymore because I got a trauma from proposing to a GIRL! She pressed on with enough enthusiasm to push aside my appeal and I ended up folding like a coward.

I got a wife in the game.

□ Rusian: Aah, I'm beat...

□ Apricot: Rusian, your EXP went up?

□ Rusian: Well, I guess.

We returned to the city together and are now gathered in the cafe we took over for our usual meeting spot.

Furniture with fancy wood patterns and a peaceful BGM. It's one of my favorite shops with its nice mood.

As though it's only natural, Ako sits right beside my character, Rusian, who is sitting on one of the chairs placed in that shop.

□ Ako: Good work. I'm so sorry for getting you killed over and over again, Rusian.

Ako's character shows a chat bubble while her head bobs up and down.

What was written in the bubble was what Ako had said.

Naturally, the bubble appearing allowed everyone around to see those same words.

□ Apricot: Indeed, it was more dangerous than usual today, wasn't it?

□ Ako: W-Well...

A upbeat “*pikon*♪” sound effect rings out after I banged out my words. A new window opens up on my game screen at the same time.

What appeared was whisper chat from Ako.

Whisper, *WIS*, *TELL*; those are what people call the conversation window between two people, invisible to others. Unlike chat with speech bubbles, there’s no need to worry about someone else overhearing a conversation here.

Ako often sends whisper chat messages over even when we’re with everyone else.

□ Ako: Well, I wanted to talk to you more, Rusian, so...

“And there she goes again...”

My great friend, Ako, who I had known for nearly a year in the game.

This is my wife.

I can point out the problems with that myself, but she really is my wife.

It must have been roughly a year since we first met. We came to know each other after I gave some simple advice to Ako who totally looked like a beginner. Things like how to log out and such, I think. Beginners not knowing how to end the game are actually pretty common. It’s nothing rare.

But it seemed the girl, as a complete beginner, got utterly attached to me like how a chick thinks the first thing it sees is its parent.

That was right after my suicidal charge at Nekohime, when I left my guild and played as a sad solo player; I somehow ended up looking after Ako and before I knew it, we turned out like this.

□ Rusian: But Ako, we're already married, so you don't really have to whisper, right? There's no need to keep it between us, you can just say it in public.

Replies so via whisper, I then received Ako's reply after a short while.

□ Ako: I'm now... talking directly... into... your heart...

□ Rusian: Heey, Akoo?

□ Ako: ...It's not the same... as when I chat with... the guild members... take good care of your wife... of your wife... of your wife...

□ Rusian: Listen to me here.

Well, she goes at her own pace. But it's true how I don't get bored with her around.

Whether she has a problem, finds something interesting, developed an interest in something, or has a topic to talk about, she'll tell me about it. That's the type of "girl character" she is.

Not a "girl", but a "girl character".

I don't know about the person in her.

To be frank, I believe that person could very well be male.

Rather, I believe there aren't any girls in online games.

No, I am aware they do exist somewhere in this vast world of online games, you know? Maybe there's even one around me, right? Sure, there's that exceeding low chance Ako's a girl, right? But that's of no concern to me. I'm "Rusian" in the game and Ako's "Ako". Not a female, but a "female character".

Games and RL are different. Utterly unrelated. That's why it's a "male character" and a "female character" here, not a male and a female. That's how I'm thinking about it.

It's best for the both of us, and our mental health too.

—After all, there's no chance of me seriously confessing to someone who's a male inside.

□ Schwein: Still, Rusian, you must be getting slow if you're almost dying with just that few of them, lol.

Or so Schw proudly proclaimed upon coming back from accounting for the items we gathered.

He does go on about his greatness and all, but he's a diligent guy who handles the distribution of the items after we finish hunting. That serious other side of him that appears every now and then is surprisingly cute.

□ Rusian: Man, big words there, how about you try taking my place?

□ Schwein: Ah, you're going there? You're really going there? Just watch and learn, I'll pull them all in next time.

*Hmph*, Schwein said as he went with a fired-up motion.

And Ako goes enthusiastically clapping at that.

□ Ako: main tank here! now we can won!

□ Schwein: No, I use swords, though.

□ Rusian: Ako, you're really going to talk like that?

Yep. No way a girl who says stuff like this exist.

Anyway, online games and reality are different, I don't really care.

“Well, guess that’s it.”

I received my share of the loot from the hunt this time and let out a breath.

Go on, die all you like; LA isn't newbie-friendly enough to say that. EXP falls on and on as the death penalty. We defeated all those monsters today, but the death penalties took all the EXP those gave. All I got was the money.

Not that I care too much about what I got since my goal was to play with everyone, though.

□ Apricot: Still, the two of you were certainly stuck together today.

Master spoke with his sight pointed towards our characters.

□ Rusian: Stuck together? Weren't we the same as always?

□ Apricot: If that's normal, then all the more it proves how lovey-dovey you are, right? It's been almost a year since we met, but the two of you have always gotten along great. It went full circle.

Master nods on the screen. Stop it, it's seriously embarrassing if you start talking about love in a game's marriage.

□ Rusian: That's not it, seriously.

□ Schwein: What are you being all humble for? Hmph, you damned normalfag.

Done with distributing the gold, Schwein talked with his sword raised.

What's he going on about? I have no idea how is marrying in-game supposed to qualify for that.

□ Rusian: What are you talking about, it's just winning at online life at most.

□ Schwein: That's true... no, hold on. I would be closer to one, huh. I mean, someone even confessed to me IRL the other day.

□ Apricot: Oh, now that's something.

□ Rusian: Seriously?! Schw, don't tell me you're actually some hot dude?!

Man, I'm jealous. He got it way better than I do.

Damn it, hot guys should just go die—

□ Ako: Aargh, Schw-chan, you should just go die.

□ Rusian: Eh?

□ Schwein: A-Ako?

Ako's getting unusually heated up by my side.

And she's going on without any concern for our confusion.

□ Ako: Why don't those normalfags winning at life just all die? Why stay in this game if they're getting confessed to, they might as well get out from the game, just having them around

makes me feel depressed. Aah, can't those types of people just go extinct? They aren't any good for the world, fufufufufufufufu

□ Rusian: Ako, calm down, calm down!

□ Schwein: I rejected, I turned it down! I don't care about something like romance!

□ Ako: fuhi fuhi fuhiihihi

□ Rusian: Come back to us!

I coax Ako into calming down.

Yep, well, sure, my wife does get weird at times.

□ Rusian: I hate them as much as you do, but don't let that out on our comrades.

□ Ako: Y-Yes, I'm sorry.

Ako curtly lowers her head.

□ Schwein: I'm no different, though, lol.

□ Apricot: I totally understand what you mean.

We came to an outstanding agreement.

Why are we all uniting in our jealousy against those socially apt normalfags? This guild's way too twisted.

But that's exactly why we get along, they're all good people. We may be just a guild of four, but it's thanks to these guys that I'm enjoying this game.

□ Apricot: In that sense, you're the closest, aren't you, Ako, Rusian?

□ Ako: It's not all it's cracked up to be, listen to me!

Ako jumped to her feet.

The character turns to face me before letting out a chat message with her two hands pressed down on her chest as though appealing to me.

□ Ako: Rusian rejected my confessions filled with love time and time again. my lifespan was already mach from stress!

□ Rusian: I gave the OK in the end, didn't I?

□ Ako: It's about the journey, not the destination!

Ooh, my wife sure can talk.

I have my own ideas if you want to bring that up, though.

□ Rusian: Right, got it, then let's reset and start back at our first conversation.

□ Ako: I wasn't serious sorry no divorce plz don't throw me aside!

Ako folded in an instant.

That said, I do like how she's true to herself.

□ Schwein: Yep, there's the problem.

Schw's bubble showed up as though to cover Ako.

□ Schwein: Rusian, you said you rejected Ako's marriage proposal once? Seriously? I know I'm not the best person to say this, but you normally wouldn't be able to get her to say OK unless you're earning on the scale of b's, ya know?

□ Ako: I-I'm not that amazing...

There Ako was, cowering out of shyness behind the large bubble.

You shouldn't be getting embarrassed here, really, no one's praising you. You're being treated like some gold digger character.

□ Apricot: I'm curious too. What did you have against it, Rusian? Haven't you two gotten along great the whole time?

Master joins in the questioning.

Honestly, I would rather not explain.

But it would be rude to not explain when asked. I tap on my keyboard.

□ Rusian: I don't hate Ako or anything, just in-game marriage and the like. I mean, it's a game, you know, a game. It's not real life or anything.

That was why I rejected her once.

I'm not against it when I think about how Ako simply wants to deepen our ties with that request, but still, I hesitate when it comes to marriage. Well—there was that with Nekohime-san too.

□ Schwein: Whatcha you mean different from real life? It's not like you could possibly marry in RL, so you might as well get some experience with that here, Rusian.

□ Rusian: There are some lines you don't cross, how about you consider that?!

There are things you can say, and those you can't!

I have my own delicate points too, you know!

And as though to hold back my argument, Ako's chat message shows up on the screen.

□ Ako: Oh, yes, that's that. I heard from Rusian, but apparently, he confessed to a guy in the past.

□ Rusian: wha

□ Schwein: Ooh, lol

□ Apricot: He did?!

Ah, Ako?! You're going to say it?! Without any hesitance?!

You're going to expose your husband's disgrace without warning?!

□ Schwein: I didn't think he was gay, lololol. Don't worry, I'm not so narrow-minded as to reject you on that, lolol.

□ Apricot: Indeed, the same goes for me. It's fine, Rusian, you have no need to worry. We are comrades. Aah, wait, don't you get anything closer, I'll kick you out of the guild.

□ Rusian: How about some mercy, guys?!

Schw and Master spoke while their laughter filled the screen.

Aah, damn it, this is annoying as heck. And you accepting it isn't making me any more at ease!

□ Rusian: That's not it. It's just, well, look.

□ Schwein: Look?

□ Rusian: Well, yeah, that.

□ Apricot: That?

- Rusian: It's really nothing big.
- Schwein: We won't laugh, go on.
- Apricot: It's fine, don't worry. Believe in your guild master.
- Ako: It's okay, Rusian, everyone will hear you out.

Master, Schw, and Ako urged me in turn.

Ah, I so do not want to say it. I don't, but there's no helping it, huh?

- Rusian: It's just, well, I seriously confessed to a GIRL in the past and got turned down real bad, you see...

□ Schwein: lolololololol

□ Apricot: lolololol

□ Rusian: I knew you would laugh!

And I was laughed at enough to make myself depressed immediately after typing it.

Aaaah, I knew I shouldn't had said it!

□ Schwein: This is hardly me, but my stomach's seriously hurting, lolol it's hard typing when laugh so much lolol

□ Apricot: This must be the first time I spewed out my coffee IRL, good job, Rusian, to think you had hidden away something this amazing.

□ Rusian: Just how funny do the two of you find it?!

□ Schwein: I mean, you confessed to a GIRL? You can't even pass that off as some mistake of youth anymore.

□ Apricot: That would be under memories of spring, huh?

□ Rusian: Forget it, please!

□ Schwein: How could we?

□ Apricot: I've already taken screenshots too.

You guys are rotten to the core, aren't you?!

Return those warm and fuzzy feelings I had when I thought well of you!

□ Schwein: I'll save the image as 7.13 Rusian GIRL Confession Incident.

□ Rusian: That incident didn't happen today in the first place! Delete it now!

Heck, doesn't that make it sound like I was confessing that I was a GIRL?!

Still, that hero's death really did hurt.

My tastes are as normal as they can be, so when it comes to marriage or romance, I do find it important for the other party to be of the other gender. It would be tough whispering words of love with someone who may be male inside.

But still, I gave the OK to marry with Ako due to my fixation on how "games and RL are different".

The shock I had after seriously confessing to that GIRL on that day two years ago was bad enough for me to leave the guild right after and play solo for close to a year.

There was a single truth that spurred me to regain my footing amidst all that.

"That was... 'Who cares as long as it's cute!', it's this saying!"

I hold my fist before the screen alone.

That's how magnificent a truth it is.

Even if the other party's male IRL and acts as female in the game, who cares as long as that's cute? I shall love the cuteness within the game. Even if that's from a GIRL.

Yes, I wasn't fooled; I was enlightened with this truth in the game!

—Well, I made that compromise in my heart on that rationale. Games and RL are different. Completely unrelated. That's my current principle.

It would be too unfair if I go, “A GIRL? No way I’m marrying or anything,” by that logic, wouldn’t it? Ako’s Ako, so even if she’s some guy IRL, why should I see that in her?

I overcame that resistance in the end.

And besides, look.

□ Ako: Rusian, are you mad? Maybe I shouldn’t have told anyone after all?

*Pikon*; a whisper chat showed up from Ako.

□ Rusian: Aah, don’t worry about it. I was prepared to made fun of and all.

□ Ako: Thanks, Rusian.

Upon waiting for a moment after that chat message.

□ Rusian: I love you.

Right as those words were displayed, multiple heart shapes flew from Ako.

I mean, look, cuteness's cute after all, right?!

“.....C-Calm down, calm down, me. You've went through this before, you'll regret it if you go in too deep...!”

Inhale, exhale; inhale, exhale.

Breathe deeply and calm your heart down.

That black-haired girl dressed in a white robe sitting beside your character, me. This is an avatar, nothing more than a form of representation in the game, it's not healthy having your heart beat faster IRL from that.

□ Apricot: I see, that's why you hesitated, huh?

Perhaps having settled down after laughing until now, Master spoke while nodding.

I wasn't that bothered. Who cares about RL? Seriously now, I honestly don't care much about it.

I mean, sure, I do think it would be nice if it was a female inside. If only it wasn't a guy in her, I would think Ako as a good girl. If only it wasn't a guy in her, it would be a nice feeling having some girl fond of you, even if it is in a game. If it wasn't a guy in her—but it has to be one, thinking about it realistically. As if there could be some girl who would laugh out, “fuhiihihihi”.

Even in the one-in-a-million chance it's a she in her, how could we be in the same age range?

I imagine the girls in my class playing online games... not happening.

Aah, no matter how I think about it, it's impossible.

□ Ako: I would be considered a girl, though?

Ako typed that out, perhaps reading the atmosphere.

Hey, what's with that "would be considered"?

□ Ako: I'm a Cleric in LA, but I'm a bookworm girl type in real life.

□ Schwein: Woah, wait, you'll be breaking the worst taboo in online games if you announce that in open chat.

Schw rebuked.

RL information, not to mention appealing as a girl, certainly would be one of the most disliked actions she could take.

□ Ako: Is that so?

□ Rusian: It is, it's best if you don't repeat that.

I chide Ako as well while she looks on blankly.

It's a real relief that this cafe we're in is deserted despite how we're in town.

□ Apricot: Who cares if it's a taboo. I'll just reveal I'm totally an actual JK IRL.

Master says while laughing with a snort.

JK in real life—a female high school student. That Master.

This ridiculously heavy cash warrior, guarded fully by cash equipment, who powers up with cash items during battle and wolves down cash recovery item on the verge of death claims to be a female high school student?

□ Rusian: Master, just no.

Unable to handle how appalling that sounded, I gave a frank riposte.

□ Apricot: To think I would get treated like this after gathering my courage and stepping on that taboo. On the other hand, it actually feel somewhat good.

□ Schwein: Master, that's impossible.

□ Apricot: Even you, Schwein?

□ Ako: Master, that can't be true.

□ Schwein: The whole world's against you, huh?

That heavy cash spending can't be from anything but some single member of society; what female high school student are you talking about? Don't be silly.

You think a woman who would inadvertently spend more money than a man, usually, could wring out that amount of cash would make even me, a normal male high school student, jealous?

□ Apricot: Still, I see. I understand your concerns, Rusian.

□ Rusian: No, I didn't say a thing, though?

□ Apricot: Yes, yes, I see everyone is of the same mind.

No one said a thing from the start.

Master continues, casually ignoring my opinion.

□ Apricot: Well then! Let's do this!

Huge words appeared above Master's head.

“Guild Alley Cats... Offline Meeting No. 1 Decided...?”

I blankly read out those words.

By the way, fireworks shot off with that. We’re indoors, though.

□ Apricot: Applause, please!

□ Rusian: Master, both that big chat message and fireworks are cash items, aren’t they?

□ Apricot: Applause, please!

*Clap, clap clap*; everyone put their hands together without really thinking.

Wait, eh, offline meeting?

By an offline meeting, you mean meeting those online acquaintances offline, or in other words, in RL?

How did that lead to this? Are you saying it for real?

□ Apricot: I was thinking we had to have some sort of event with the guild a year old. What do you say we take advantage of this opportunity and have our first offline meeting?

□ Schwein: Even if you ask—it’s decided already, isn’t it?

Master speaks after Schw rips into his chat message.

□ Apricot: It is!

□ Schwein: What is this, a dictatorship?!

Master’s Master, these things happen.

Still, well, deciding it is fine and all, but...

□ Schwein: Nhh... besides, is everyone in?

Schw says with slight irritation.

His mood's obvious enough even with those words in that chat message.

□ Ako: By offline meeting, you mean, meeting with everyone?

Ako, somewhat hesitant. I confirmed my suspicions with those words alone. The person behind would be exposed if we were to do some offline message. I know, right?

That said, I'm not much for it either.

I mean, look, I don't care whether it's a male or female inside Ako. RL and games are different. That's an absolute principle for me. That's why I married her.

But that depends on the prerequisite of me not knowing the truth, does it?

If I were to find out my wife's a GIRL and even the truth behind you on top of that... that level of difficulty may be a little too high for my young self and all.

□ Rusian: Aren't we all living at different places? It shouldn't be too easy to gather everyone, right?

I timidly opposed with a pessimistic viewpoint.

This guild rarely talks about RL. Not wanting to hear about RL if possible—especially in regards to genders—I hadn't spoken much about it and I don't recall Ako, Schw, or Master making much effort at approaching that topic.

However, Master speaks.

□ Apricot: Fufufu, don't look down on me. I have my guesses based on your reactions in regards to weather changes or topics on local television. Firstly, everyone's definitely in the Kantou region.

He asserted strongly.

Yep, that's right, I am in Kantou.

True, we might have all been able to relate whenever it rained, whenever there were earthquakes, and such.

□ Schwein: Hey, I'm not going to somewhere like Akihabara even if you tell me to.

□ Rusian: That's right. It would be tough even if you want an offline meeting in Tokyo.

□ Apricot: I know. It's within my expectations that everyone here's a student.

Hmm, so that's out of the bag too, huh? Well, I guess I might have mentioned things like how my login times would be irregular due to tests the next week every once in a blue moon.

□ Rusian: I can't believe you pay that much attention, Master... it's kind of scary.

□ Apricot: That's natural for a guild master. Don't worry, by the authority of the master, I say we'll hold it at the station closest to me.

□ Ako: That's tyranny, Master!

□ Apricot: Say what you will. We will hold it this Sunday! Come to Maegasaki Station on that day if you will.

“That’s so near!”

I unwittingly let that out before the monitor.

Oh, that was a surprise. That’s my closest station too. I can get there by bicycle.

But I doubt anyone aside from Master and I would gather at a station that minor—that might be relaxing in its own way, I guess. He would probably treat me to a meal at least.

I tap the keyboard with my mood somewhat uplifted.

Immediately after pressing the Enter key, bubbles showed up above Ako, Schw, and me at the same time.

□ Rusian: Your house sure is close, Master. I can go, though.

□ Schwein: I don’t mind, but that’s never working out.

□ Ako: I’m okay, but are you sure holding it there?

.....Eh?

□ Rusian: Eh?

□ Schwein: Eh?

□ Ako: What’s with that, creepy.

Our three chat messages coincided once more.

□ Apricot: Right, everyone’s in, then. That’s good to hear.

□ Schwein: Wait, what... everyone lives this close by?

□ Schwein: I can’t believe it...

This isn’t some joke?

I vacantly stared on, amazed.

Seriously? We might have even passed by each other at the station or something?

The Internet's surprisingly small, ain't it?

□ Apricot: Right, be sure to come since you said you would, listen?!

□ Ako: I-I got it. I'm a man of my word too, I'll take responsibility for what I said!

Those words shows up on the balloon displayed above Ako.

□ Rusian: Wait, what did you just

□ Ako: No, that was just a figure of speech!

I heard something really bad. Something real bad.

Aah, I really don't want to go.

□ Apricot: Your wife's coming, so you're coming too, aren't you, husband?

□ Rusian: Aah... got it.

Don't wanna. I really don't wanna. I super duper don't wanna, but there's no going back, I'll firm up my resolve.

□ Apricot: I will naturally go as well, so that makes three of us. You're coming too, aren't you, Schwein?

□ Schwein: No, I'm... aah, we're doing it? We're seriously doing it?

□ Apricot: Well, there's no need to be so against it, Schwein, just come. We won't snub you if you don't, but there's no point getting left out either, right?

□ Schwein: Nhh... damn, I get it.

Schw's shoulders lurched down as he nodded.

Well, he should be fine if he still has the composure to move his character, probably.

□ Apricot: Then in consideration for you students, we shall gather at 12 noon this Sunday. Leave the arrangements for the store to me. Fufufu, I'm looking forward to it.

□ Rusian: 'kaay...

We dejectedly replied to Master's cheerful words.

We're meeting?

We're really meeting?

Do I really have to meet—with my wife?

+++ +++ +++

And the weekend arrives.

The day of the first offline meeting for the guild, "Alley Cats".

I don't know how to set my hair properly like those socially apt male high school students and stood around before the mirror before heading out to our meeting place.

I wonder if it was out of consideration for them or my own nervousness that I arrived somewhat earlier than arranged after several minutes of cycling.

"Well, what will be, will be. Let's see... I'm here, there."

I sent a message addressed towards everyone from my phone.

Just got here, contact me when you reach, there.

I scan my surroundings after taking care of that. It's a small station, but still, there are several people waiting for others as expected of a Sunday.

That flashy guy there? Or that man in a suit? Or maybe that guy with a girl? It could even be that girl with twin tails over there.

And a reply came with a *pikon*.

Seems everyone's close by. Apparently, everyone reached.

I-I see. So they're here. Near here.

So we're finally going to have to meet? Those comrades who fought by my side for a year?

And my wife.

No, and my wife (male).

Rather, isn't this situation too strange? Why am I here getting scared meeting my wife who's male for the first time?

I considered calling, but still, I'm nervous. Let's just contact everyone for now.

"I'm wearing a white shirt with jeans, light brown shoes. I'm in front of the station at the statue... there."

I send it while my heart raced.

Replies came shortly after. From all three at the same time.

I wonder whose should I look at first and decided it would be best to make it my wife's, Ako's.

Ako's message goes, "I'm wearing a black coat with a white shirt, white—".

The sensation of someone patting my back came just as I was about to scroll the screen to read on.

Along with a soft voice.

“Erm... Rusian?”

“Eh... woah.”

It was a beautiful voice like the chimes of bells.

Oh, she's female. That was a female's voice.

E-Eeehh, there's a girl in my guild?! Who?!

Or rather, crap, it's really embarrassing being called by my in-game name!

I'm seriously dead if a classmate sees me here getting called with that Western character name!

“Y-Yes, I would be Rusian...”

I stiffly turn around in trepidation.

“G-Good afternoon.”

Standing there was a girl looking up at me in a slightly frightened manner.

She has black hair that reaches her shoulders and though her face's hidden away by her somewhat long fringe, I knew I was reflected within her large eyes trembling in unease. She looks more suited to reading a book in some library rather than playing games or going out on a rest day.

She has a black coat on a white blouse along with a white skirt.

“Erm, I-I'm Ako.”

The girl spoke haltingly.

Ako, aah, so she's Ako. I was wondering if our guild had any girls but to think it's Ako. What a surprise, so she's my wife.

—Wait, that's not it!

Ako's my wife, isn't she?!

“Ako? Ako?! Eeehh?!”

Ako? This person? This girl?!

I unconsciously check that mail.

[I'm wearing a black coat with a white shirt, white skirt, and have already arrived.”]

O-Oh.

If there aren't going to be any old guys coming here cross-dressed later on, then it should be this girl.

“...Y-You're really Ako?”

“Y-Yes.”

S-Seriously? She really was female in real life?!

And, woah, she has a ridiculously cute face hidden behind her fringe too, now that I took a closer look. Her facial features looks pretty on her face despite how slender it is; the way she looks up at me with slight timidity, makes her look super cute like a small animal on its guard.

This girl's supposed to be “my wife”?

The one I laughed with over stupid topics and exchanged silly jokes with day after day?

The one I went hunting monsters with and at times, got hunted by them with?

The one who I got mad at, the one who got mad at me, the one who I spoiled, the one who cried when I neglected her?

And the one who always told me that she loved me—that Ako?

This girl is?

“N-No-no-no, calm down, calm down, me.”

Averting my eyes a little away from Ako who looked up towards me, I silently muttered.

Don’t, keep your cool, me.

Sure she’s your wife, but that’s in the game, this is actually the first time you’re meeting. Right, she’s a girl you’re meeting for the first time. Now, be courteous, you have to react like some gentleman no matter what.

“Erm, nice to meet you, Ako-san, I’m—”

“So this is Rusian... the living Rusian!!”

The girl’s words buried mine.

L-Living?!

“What do you mean, living?! You make it sound like I’m normally dead!”

“!”

The girl trembled from my inadvertent comeback.

Ah, I messed up—or so I thought for a moment before the girl's expression relaxed.

“That’s, well, it’s normally through a monitor, so... it’s like a semi-frozen Rusian.”

“Why are you making me sound like some half-frozen sherbet?!”

“I like ice cream when it’s somewhat melted too.”

“How did it lead to that?! I don’t get it!”

Why am you arguing like this with a girl you met for the first time, me?!

Aah, this is Ako! No one else would ignore my words so magnificently!

Perhaps the other side was convinced as well; Ako’s body had loosened up from its stiff tension and she showed a slack smile.

“Wah, it’s Rusian! It’s really Rusian!”

“Please don’t call that name over and over again, really, I’m begging you here.”

Just kill me, I can’t stand the shame of having my online game character’s name called out time after time in front of the station.

I just thought about it, but if a classmate were to see this—

“R-Rusian...?”

“Eek?!”

A voice came from my side. A familiar voice.

I looked and saw a twin tailed girl there with an absolutely dumbfounded expression.

“S-Segawa?”

“Nishimura... right?”

It's my classmate, Segawa.

That Segawa who called me disgusting or annoying without hesitation.

What a disaster. It just has to be her witnessing this?

“A-Ah... aaaah...”

A strange noise leaked out from my throat as I tried to find appropriate words.

Waaah, I got seen being called by my character's name in a place teeming with peopleeeee!

Oh craaaap!

C-Caaaaalm doooown, c-c-calm down, me!

Find some excuse. To live another day in class!

“...?”

“Ah... eh?”

Ako, standing by my side, suddenly sent a look towards Segawa.

“Do you know her?”

Unlike earlier, her gaze now resembles a scary glare.

“E-Erm, I do know her, but...”

Segawa loses her composure with that gaze turned on her.

Well, I know how she feels. She would be troubled if spoken to by a girl in this situation.

No, wait. Still, this is the perfect timing, isn't it?!

"N-No, no, she's just a classmate. L-Looks like you caught me in an embarrassing spot, Segawa. Don't tell anyone in class, alright? Ha-hahaha."

I speak as though making excuses towards Ako at my side.

With that, behold, it's the very image of a boyfriend with his pampered girlfriend.

Is it? Is it, really? Am I in the clear?

"I-I-I-I see. So that's it."

Segawa faltered as well while paying no attention to my unease and, for some reason, nodded clumsily.

"So you have someone like that too, huh? G-Geez, don't get this girl mixed up into any of your weird interests, a-ahahahaha."

"T-That's true, hahahahaha."

She laugh, tense as a board, and I follow along in the same manner.

I don't know why, but we exchange stiff laughter.

"Then, I'll get going..."

"Y-Yeah. See you."

Segawa backs off in halting movements. Yay, go on back, please. And please forget about everything too.

I see Segawa off as she steadily backed away and saw someone patting her shoulder from the back.

“Eh?”

Segawa stops and turns. It’s naturally within my sight as well; it was a familiar-looking female student wearing our school’s uniform.

“Ah, erm...”

I thought she was Segawa’s acquaintance, but she seems at a loss for words too.

Who is she? I know for sure I saw her somewhere.

I considered her being my classmate, but that’s not it. The ribbon isn’t the first-years’ red like ours but the second-years’ blue.

“...President.”

Ako spoke with her usual apprehensive gaze.

Aah, that’s right, that’s it. Of course I saw her before, she’s our student council president. We saw her at the assembly just the other day.

“Ah, t-that’s right, president. Is something the matter?”

Segawa was, naturally enough, stiff when she asked and our senior, the student council president, showed an out-of-place grin for some reason.

“No, that’s wrong.”

She shakes her head with flourish.

And while gripping onto Segawa's shoulders and pushing her towards us, she firmly speaks.

"I am not the president. I am Master. Hmm, I see everyone has safely gathered."

"Hah?"

"W-Wha?"

"Eh..."

Looking at the three of us, tilting her heads, in turn, the president smiled.

"I suppose this would be the first time we meet? I am the master of the guild, "Alleycats", Apricot."

N-No way?

It felt like the voices in everyone's hearts harmonized on those words.

"So that's Rusian and the one clinging to her husband's Ako, I see."

"Ah, yes."

"Master, good afternoon."

I could only nod blankly while Ako greets her in a voice warmer than before.

I felt a sense of discord while looking at the pair.

"Eh, wait, president, you said everyone's gathered...?"

In my vision

With her shoulders gripped by the president—Master—Segawa freezes up and turns blue as I look on.

“Eh, you’re... Schwein?”

I spoke, dumbfounded.

“Ah, so you’re Schwein-chan?”

Ako says in relief.

“What, you hadn’t told them yet, Schwein?”

Master speaks while laughing.

“D-Don’t call me by that name!”

And Segawa—Schwein—hugged her head as she cowered.

“No way...”

“T-That’s what I should be saying!”

Ignoring Segawa who glared at me in despair, Master spoke with her usual tone filled with confidence.

“Now, let us start our commemorable first offline meeting, Alley Cats.”

Led by Master, we entered a private room she apparently reserved in a restaurant.

It appeared affluent from the outside, obviously prizing itself on not being cheap, and the inside matched up as well with a design reflecting comfort and its owner’s good tastes. I became somewhat nervous, wondering if I had enough money.

But those are just trifles. There’s something more important.

Firstly, it should have been a filthy offline meeting between four men—and in front of me who came with that expectation are three girls. They're cute in their own ways and could maybe even be called beautiful. If an outsider sees this situation, they may consider this to be an envious situation.

If you were to ask me for my thoughts, honestly, this is awkward. Super awkward.

First, there's Segawa sitting diagonally in front of me with the table between us. And she's totally glaring at me. That Segawa who usually call geeks or me disgusting. I'm sure you aren't in a good mood but neither am I.

Next, we have the president who just ordered in a accustomed manner. We usually look up towards her while she stood on a stage and even from this angle, the impression created from her manner of speech is one of calm and collectedness, one with presence of mind, a cool beauty; I can't settle down just by having her close by.

And above all else, there's the girl sitting beside me, clinging tight onto like just like in-game—Ako.

“.....”

“...?”

I slowly slid towards my side and separated, and she shortened the distance as though it was only natural.

She turns a bright smile towards me when I glance at her.

Aah, this is Ako. This uncontrollable clump of affection is Ako.



It's Ako, but... I know, it's Ako, but.

It's strange. I mean, it is strange, isn't it?

Look, this Ako's cute. She's Ako but cute.

Silky hair and a petite frame. Her slender features make her seem suited to reading in some library, but when I look at her smile at me, I feel she's all soft and fluffy.

I feel like I saw her somewhere before, but I can't recall where at all. I doubt I would forget a girl this cute that easily.

"Hey, hey, Rusian."

I continue watching her and Ako, for some reason, looked back at me happily before reaching her hands out towards me.

"W-What is it?"

"Nn..."

They cling onto me, touching my shoulders, my chest, my cheeks... w-wait, what is she trying?

"Waah, Rusian, you're alive, aren't you?"

"What's that supposed to mean?!"

And the words she finally let out were those.

Just what am I in her head?

"Don't say it like it's strange for me to be alive."

Holding Ako's head back from the front, I push her back.

"Kyaan-"

Ako swayed back with that whimper.

Ah, not good, I acted a little too familiar. I treated her in this manner since Ako was being too Ako, but she is a girl I'm meeting for the first time. She obviously would be against me touching her.

“S-Sorry, are you okay?”

Not to mention how she looks rather like the quiet type; that action was definitely off-limit. Wasn't that alone enough for her to hate me now?

Ako ignored that anxiety of mine.

“Ehehe... you really are Rusian.”

And gave a happy smile for some reason.

It was the same old routine as in the game; no matter how many times I snub her, she would croon and come over to get pampered like an over-attached cat. She was here in her actual body, not as some game avatar.

Despite Ako acting like she does in the game, my reaction's completely different from usual. My heart starts beating faster and—wait, no, no, no. What are you doing, having a girl you just met fawn all over you like it's only natural?

I'm feeling really guilty, as if I'm making use of our relationship in the game.

“Why are you brushing her off so gleefully? You should be the one getting the cold shoulder here.”

Segawa spoke in an exasperated manner with a sigh.

Did you have to say it like that? I do know this is strange myself.

“Hey, you.”

“W-What?”

Though Segawa cowered for a moment, likely frightened by my glare, she still kept her eyes on me without averting them. She sure is annoying. She calls people geeks and all, but she's an online game geek herself, isn't she—not that I would point it out on purpose now of all times, though. It wouldn't kill her to be a bit more gentle.

“? What's the matter?”

Without meeting Ako's eyes directed at our exchange, Segawa spoke.

“It's nothing...”

In a soft voice.

“Well, the drinks are here too. First of all... yes, shall we start with self-introductions?”

Engaged in conversation with someone from the store until earlier, the president distributed glasses to us while she spoke.

Dropping my sight onto the glass of juice before my eyes, I let out a breath.

Self-introduction, huh?

It sounds foolish with our relationships going a year back, but it is our first time meeting in a sense.

Master placed her glass down with a light *clink*, and stood up from her chair in a gentle and excessively refined manner.

“I am the master of [Alley Cats], Apricot. My job is Law Wizard and as I believe you know, I have confidence in my firepower. I am a second year in Maegasaki High School, my name’s Goshouin Kyou, and I serve the student council as its president. I came here from school today, so do excuse my attire.”

A tone full of confidence. This person’s personality doesn’t change, does it?

“This day, this time would be the first time we meet. However, at the same time, we are close comrades. Why don’t we enjoy that pleasant yet complex relationship to its fullest?”

With that speech that would have fitted a stage, the president gave a slight bow before sitting onto her chair.

Light applause ring out.

“Now then, next.”

Schw swipes her eyes away upon seeing Master’s sight directed at her. Those eyes turn to me—woah, scary, she’s totally glaring at me. It’s not like I’m at fault or anything.

“Go on, Schwein, it’s your turn.”

“Ugh...”

Segawa staggers onto her feet, giving off the impression that the embarrassment from being called Schwein had exceeded what she could handle.

“I’m... I am Segawa Akane, Maegasaki High School, first year.”

A soft voice unlike her usual self. What, she nervous?

“And, erm...”

That mumbling isn’t her at all.

A look showed that her face was dyed crimson red.

Looking upwards towards her, I realized she was the type of girl my race of geeks is fond of: her brown hair stopping at her underarms; her petite form, be it her height or anything else; and her sweet appearance.

Sure, it’ll be tough saying your hobby’s online gaming while looking like that, but still, her vehement complaints about geeks being disgusting is another matter entirely.

I don’t know how she took Segawa’s tension, but.

“Yes, I understand how you feel, Schwein, it’s only natural to feel embarrassed calling yourself Schwein before others.”

“Er... erm, Master?”

Master suddenly spoke, nodding as though empathizing with her.

She continues with deep emotion.

“After all, Schwein is German for pig. Hello, I’m Pig, nice to meet you. It must be embarrassing to say something to the tune of that as a maiden.”

“Ye... eh, what?”

Segawa—Schwein—the pig freezes up with her mouth agape.

After a blank of several seconds, her face turns crimson red before she questions Master.

“What, eh, no way, you serious? Pig? Schwein?”

“Indeed. ... You mean to say you used it without knowing?”

“Of course I did, who would name themselves pig?! Isn’t it obvious I used it because it sounded cool?!”

“Schw-chan... my condolences...”

She might have already known, but Ako looked downwards with a pitiful expression.

“Wait, Master, why didn’t you tell me?!”

It seems to have been truly outside her expectations as Segawa ended up calling to Master normally.

Ah, looks like she got her energy back.

“I did consider doing so, but I held back, figuring that pointing it out would be all the more embarrassing if you did it without knowing rather than on purpose. My, it is beyond even my expectations that it would be exposed in a place like this...”

“Waah, hold on, stop it!”

Segawa waves her hands in a fluster.

Ignoring her, Master smiled in an excellent mood.

“Come on, Schwein (haha), hurry on and continue your self-introduction.”

“Don’t say that bracket-open, haha, bracket-close out loud! Were you always reading it out like that in front of your monitor?!”

“Hey, Schw-chan, there’s no need to act so modest. No one will mind your usual attitude, why don’t you go, ‘I’m the great Schwein!', like you always do?”

“Don’t say that out looooooud!”

Segawa crumbled, finished off by Ako’s comment.

I-Is she okay? That was just too much.

“Kuh, kuh, kuh... no need to go that fast from the very start, Schwein. This is usually where all the lol start flying past.”

“Come to think of it, how are those ‘el-oh-el’ letters people always use read?”

Is she talking about ‘lol’?

True, no one really reads it out or know how to read it despite how often it’s used.

“That’s short for *little old lady*.”

Master spoke with a know-it-all air. No, that’s definitely wrong.

“That’s not what it means, right? Isn’t that read as laughing out loud?”

“Ooh, as expected of you, Rusian.”

Ako clapped her hands together.

What am I to do with that appreciation? In the first place, was there a right answer?

“Aaah, geez, why are all of you just ignoring me?!”

Slapping the table, Schwein took in a deep breath of air.

“Whew... hah... aah, I’m Schwein. I play a Sword Dancer in LA. If anyone calls me a pig from now on, I’ll cut you into two. Also, you join ‘ol’ to ‘lol’ to lengthen it, but don’t read it literally. I won’t acknowledge anything else. That’s all!”

Segawa says everything she had to say and sits down.

Applause somewhat more lively than before envelops her. Maybe she finally came to terms with it, but her expression appeared to have loosened up though it’s still sour.

“On a side note, I am personally one of those who read it as *lawl*.”

“No one’s asked you about that.”

“Oh, my apologies.”

The smile Master turned towards Segawa then appeared somewhat gentle.

Did you do that on purpose to return her to normal? If you did, good job, as expected of our guild master.

“Then, next, Rusian.”

“Got it.”

Having expected it, I stand straight up.

And clinging onto my arm, Ako follows suit.

“Hey, Ako.”

“Yes?”

Ako looked up at me as though nothing’s out of the ordinary. She’s cute like an over-attached cat, but we aren’t like that.

“It’s my self-introduction, so go sit down.”

“Okaay.”

It seems she does listen to reason as always. Ako obediently takes her seat.

“Why are you flirting around?”

“No, it’s not like I’m trying to.”

Wait, this isn’t the time for that.

I took in a deep breath and looked around the trio.

“I’m Rusi... Rusian. In LA, I’m, er... er, I play as an Armor Knight. ...Waah, introducing myself with my character name’s seriously embarrassing.”

It wasn’t like I was saying anything important, but the embarrassment still made me choke on my words.

“What are you talking about, your whole existence’s an embarrassment, anyway.”

“Shuddup.”

Segawa disrupts. Normally—no, just a short while ago, those same words would have made me pretty irritated.

I wonder why I didn’t feel anything at all against them now. There was just that sense of comfort that comes with arguing with Schw in-game.

“In the first place, the pig thing’s way more embarrassing—sorry, won’t mention that again. Erm, I’m in the same high school as president—ah, understood, my bad, Master. Should I be formal due to our positions? ...’kay. Erhm, I’m a first year,

the name's Nishimura Hideki. I'm in the Home-Going club and have no special talent of note. My hobbies are, well... online gaming. Nice meeting you."

Light claps rang out.

How do I say this, it's like that, you know? Our year together wasn't just for show. I somehow get what Master and Segawa wants to say just from their glances at me when I was talking.

"Then, lastly, Ako."

"Okaay."

Ako stood up with a soft *oof*.

Due to her standing up right beside me, those slender legs hidden by her skirt came by my face.

My heart starts beating quicker for a reason different from during that self-introduction.

Next, a sweet fragrance in the air shook my head.

It's really not the time to point it out, but she's really a girl, isn't she?

"Erm, I'm Ako. I'm a Cleric in LA. I'm not very good at games and always cause trouble for others... I'm very sorry."

It's fine, no problem, Schw goes.

Well, sure it is for you, your life is rarely ever at stake due to that!

"I'm at Maegasaki High School like everyone else, in the first year."

"Huh, we're in the same year?"

“Yes, we actually are.”

So in the end, we’re all in the same school? Isn’t the Internet way too small?

“Sorry, I didn’t know. I’m a first year too and don’t know any girls from the other classes.”

“Ehehe, me too.”

Well, duh. It’s only been months since we enrolled, I wouldn’t have any connections to other classes since I’m not even in any clubs. Ako looks like the quiet type, so she’s probably not the type to form connections either.

Ako continues without showing any concern over those.

“My name is Tamaki Ako. Please call me Ako as you always do.”

“Eh, it’s your real name?”

“Yes. ...Is it strange?”

That’s strange, alright.

“Nah, there’s all that about digital literacy, so doing that is... no, well, it’s fine.”

“Hahaha, that’s just like you, Ako.”

Segawa shows a sullen face expressing how she thought that Ako’s naming method was clearly a bad idea while Master laughs in a laid-back tone.

It happened in that warm, tender atmosphere.

“I hadn’t entered any clubs. I have no friends in school either.”

“?!”

Everything stiffened up as though the world froze over.

E-Erm, Ako-san? What are you saying here?

“I don’t go often, so whenever I do go to school every once in a while, everyone’s wary of me.”

“O-Oh...”

It seems not even Segawa can put together another line against that.

I look towards the pair in hopes for advice on what to do, but their faces had completely turned blue from Ako saying those depressing things with a smile. What are you expecting from us even if you were to confess that now?

“D-Do not mind! I am the student council president, but I have no friends either!”

You’re going to empathize with her on that?!

I was wondering what she would come up with, but Master said that while firmly nodding.

No, no, we don’t need you appealing with something so sad now!

“L-Look, Ako, ain’t we your friends?”

Segawa agreed with a desperate look after that flustered follow-up.

“Yes, indeed! You have more friends now!!”

“You did it, Ako-chan!”

**“Hey, stop it!”**

Ako giggled at our foolish antics and words.

“Yes, that’s why... I’m truly happy having friends to talk with like this.”

Those words quivered slightly.

I could also sense Ako’s legs and shoulders trembling slightly from her side.

The offline meeting’s making her nervous... she said so in LA too, didn’t she?

“Best regards from now on as well.”

Ako sat back down amidst applause.

The images of my usual guildmembers overlap Ako, Segawa, and the president in my eyes with every word we exchange.

And thus, our offline meeting began.

“What I’m getting at, is that spending money on strengthening my armor’s the same as weakening myself by that much.”

Schw proudly speaks, poking at her coffee cup with a spoon.

“I mean, isn’t it obvious it’s more effective to put those funds into strengthening my weapons? Efficiency in hunting’s just firepower, it’s all on firepower. And throwing several m’s worth of funds into a minor change for armor? That’s nothing more than self-satisfaction. Only an idiot would do that.”

“No, that viewpoint’s far too one-sided.

I snarled at the girl speaking of her own opinion with ragged breathing from the opposite side.

“I know what you’re getting at, firepower’s important. But there are places you definitely can’t hunt at without preparing a certain level of defense and you’ll need to be there if you actually want efficiency. Look at the facts, you can’t hunt at Scion Research Lab with your equipment, can you? And there are so many sword dancers who can hunt there with ease at your level too.”

I seek Schw’s acknowledgement by meeting her eyes.

But the girl casually shrugged her shoulders and snivelled.

“That just means you need the bare minimum, doesn’t it? That’s like saying there’s no point strengthening armor more than needed.”

“There isn’t just one end-goal when it comes to armor and besides, it’s not that easy getting there either. In the first place, if you’re talking about bare minimums, doesn’t that go for weapons too? Your efficiency will barely change even if you switch out a weapon for the next rank’s despite it already being decent. That’s just horrible cost-efficiency.”

“Don’t look down on the importance of weapons. Someone like you who only considers hunting spots with monsters you can finish in one or two hits will only stay in those dull places.”

“What did you say, Mr. Great?”

“I told you not to call me that!”

“Now now, hold on, both of you.”

Master interjects from the side into our never-ending squabble.

“Listen, there’s a simpler and easy to understand way to think about it that’s just perfect. Let me explain. Think about how you can supplement whatever you lack with cash; you can see how your attack and defense will both become the strongest that way.”

“Could you keep your thoughts to yourself, heavy cash warrior? We’re having a conversation for normal players here.”

“Topic: Regarding Master’s mistreatment.”

Master got sliced into two.

“Yes, yes, I have my own thoughts too!”

The next to interject was Ako.

“I believe money spent should be on appearances. It doesn’t matter how strong your equipment is, you just have to let everyone else defeat everything, so I don’t think they actually matter.”

“Seriously, you, stop messing around.”

“I’ll knock you down.”

“Eeek?!”

Ako backs off in fear, glared at by both Schw and myself.

What appearances, idiot, if you have the time to think about your outfit, then how about surviving for even a second more or healing for even a point more?

“Ako-san, do you understand how healing jobs absolutely have to remain alive until the end?”

“Eeh, but Rusian dies before I can do anything...”

“Just pointing this out, but my equipment works just fine as the main tank, you know?!”

Has she been thinking of me in that manner this whole time?!

I gulped down all of my juice.

She doesn't understand at all, if you're spending money, it should obviously be on armor, geez.

“Listen here, first of all, you'll die without good armor. After all, our healer's super lousy.”

“That, I can't deny.”

“Indeed, there's no further room for discussion there.”

“Aah, aah, I can't hear a thing!”

Starting from discussion regarding the game in that manner, our conversations switched topics whenever we felt like it.

For example, to old stories.

“Ako's heal that time was killer, don't you think? I never thought she would ignore Rusian when he's about to die and send several heals to the enemy.”

“Not to mention how her pinpoint aim for the enemies whose HP I was shaving away.”

That's from mere days ago. I seriously thought I was done for, then.

“T-That only happened because I was aiming for the decreasing bar.”

Master clapped her hands together when Ako mumbled an excuse.

“Aah, I got it. The spirits of light are to be blamed.”

“Spirits of light?”

Ah, I remember, it’s that thing!

“Ah, from all the way back at the start? Ako didn’t know how to use skills and a NPC told her to borrow power from the spirits of light, so she kept praying to the ‘Spirits’ in the chat!”

“—?!”

Ako waved her hands about as though to chase something away when we brought up that piece of ancient memory.

“T-That’s not it! I mean, that church person talked about how they heal wounds by borrowing power from the spirits of light!”

“You aren’t any better for believing in it...”

Or for example, to RL topics which we hadn’t broached at all previously.

“I’m not much older, my online cash was initially funded by my parents. My parents are over-protective despite effectively neglecting me, you see, they say all sort of comedic things that hardly suit this time period with a straight face, like to choose my friends wisely. It wouldn’t do if I wasn’t at least allowed to sink money into a game I can play at home.”

“Ooh, so you’re some privileged lady from a good family, Master?”

“You give off that feel, you’re so pretty too.”

Master grinned back at Ako who said that with narrowed eyes.

“Not really.”

“How modest...”

M-Modest? I find that questionable.

“It truly doesn’t apply to me much. Though I am rich, I grew from that initial loan on my own, and my family only owns several companies and schools.”

Hey, you didn’t deny that part about being pretty.

Sure, I don’t find anything of dispute in her words, but there’s definitely no modesty there.

“Still, schools... that means.”

“That includes Maegasaki High School. That is partly why I enrolled there.”

“No way, amazing! It’s like you’re the board chairman’s daughter!”

“I am the board chairman’s daughter.”

“Ooh, that’s amazing. Sounds you can just pump up your grades and stuff. I’m jealous.”

Pump up? Those aren’t stats. Is your brain too deep in online games?”

Schw spoke, exasperated. Shut up, I bet you thought something like that too.

I avert my eyes towards my side with a snort and there Ako is, smiling with a darkness in her eyes.

“Waah... those moneybags with a bright, promised future should just go die...”

Erm... A-Ako-san?

“Ako, Ako?!”

“Calm down, Ako, this is Master! Or rather, that disease happens here too?!”

Come back, come back to us; I shake Ako’s shoulders.

Swaying around, Ako’s complexion returned after around ten spins.

“I’m sorry, I lost track of myself.”

“That’s an understatement... besides, don’t you have to pay attention to all sorts of things as the board chairman’s daughter and the student council president?”

“Well, I can’t deny that.”

Master spoke with a wry smile.

“I can’t very well say I started with a personality others felt amiable and there were requirements for my friends too. But do not worry, my eyes opened after starting online games and coming into contact with the online world. I had my parents agree to allow me to make friends as I like by the end of our battle.”

“Ooh.”

Everyone lets out voices of admiration.

One of those who found truth on the Internet—a successful version of that?

Yep, yep, that's good, really.

“It was too late, however.”

Everyone's voice went silent.

“M-Master?”

“...Hmph. Even without any friends in my friends, I shall fight on alone.”

“Master, let's fight against the socially apt together!”

“That sounds good, Ako, we are comrades-in-arms.”

Ako and Master's hands gripped onto each other firmly, crossing the boundaries of school years.

“My stomach's hurting just from looking at this.”

“I didn't come this far to see such a handshake...”

Both Schw and I wiped our tears off.

And talking about RL topics were far more fun than expected despite us never having done so. So much that I wonder why we didn't.

That said, we never would have this opportunity if we did, so all's well that ends well.

Something came to mind since we were talking about RL.

“Come to think of it, I heard a rumor about you, Segawa... Schw in school the other time.”

“Hah? What?”

“A rumor that you got confessed to. Aren’t you an amazing one?”

I heard that story about Maeda Whatshisname at the schoolwide assembly. I recall Schw personally talking about it too.

“H-Haah? How did that turn into a rumor? This is why all guys are just so...”

“Rather, weren’t you bragging about it in-game? I remember, you know?”

“That’s that.”

And this is this, huh?

I don’t care much—though I’m not sure about the rest.

“I see, so Schwein is one of those splendid people different from us, is that it? I understand just fine now. —Come on, I need someone to punch a wall!”

Master’s fingers goes *snap*.

As though in response, Ako posed with her two arms raised into the air.

“Wall punching agent at your service! We’ll punch any wall near you in your place!”

“I rejected! I said I rejected him, didn’t I?!”

Schw makes haste to extinguish the flames as Ako gripped her hands into fists.

“You turned him down so bluntly because you don’t have much interest in such things, Schw? Or maybe you have someone else you like?”

I somehow asked a privacy-invading question that made me wonder if I was crossing the boundaries. I could never have asked that question normally, but I wonder why, it came out so naturally.

“Nah, that’s... hmm...”

And the one asked, Schw, begins to think of an answer without showing any discomfort despite that.

Segawa isn’t all that stylish. She’s short, or rather, her entire frame’s small. She’s probably not one for femininity. Her twin tails can look either childish or cute depending on the person, and there may be some against it.

Still, at the very least, her facial features more than made up for everything. I can objectively call her cute.

And I wouldn’t say those previous features of hers are unnecessary—or so I think.

“I mean, if I were to get a boyfriend and all, I’ll have to devote time to all that, right?”

Schw quietly spoke after a little brooding.

“Well, yeah, you’ll need that quality time for the both of you.”

“Right? And that means less time for online games, doesn’t it?”

“That’s it?!”

She said something messed up in various ways!

“That really would decrease time for online gaming, wouldn’t it?”

And for some reason, Ako gives her strong approval.

“Yes, that’s it!”

Segawa continues, having gained a sympathizer.

“I mean, you would be totally against that, right?”

“I would be totally against that!”

“Rejecting’s the correct course to take.”

And both Ako and Master agree without needing even a second of consideration.

“You weren’t kidding around, huh...”

To think even I feel like wanting a girl. This group of people are gone as far as they can go.

Schw glared hard at me after I spoke with my amazement on full display.

“What, you have a problem?”

“...No. I know I prefer this compared to you in school.”

“That’s definitely no praise, is it?”

Contrary to her upset words, Schw laughed good-naturedly.

I could never talk like this or say these things with Segawa as my conversation partner, but it’s an easy task with Schw.

Those usually annoying words don’t sting at all.

I’m somewhat amused instead.

And unless I'm mistaken, Schw seems to be enjoying that too.

"Then, let's turn that thought on its head! How about getting a husband like me in-game too, Schw-chan? You can be together without losing time spent in the game, you see?"

Ako spoke, grasping my hand.

No, Ako and I are married only in-game and that has absolutely no connection to a RL confession. None, not even a smidgen.

"Nn, a boyfriend who I can play online games with, well... nah, still not happening. They would be disgusting and all.

"Hey, you."

Don't look at me while saying that, aren't you the same?

Anyway, we talked about everything. We stayed cooped up in that private room from noon to evening without going to any other stores; the offline meeting was fun in its own little way without even a single moment of boredom.

And by the time the sun sank, we left the shop and returned to the station despite our reluctance to part.

"If only I had the time, I wish we could all have dinner together. My apologies, I could not obtain any further permission from my family."

"It's fine, mine would be mad too if I weren't back in time for dinner."

Schw ungrudgingly nodded at Master who lowered her head.  
Aren't your positions reversed?

"It was really fun. Someday... someday, let's do this again."

Leaving the store last, Ako spoke in low spirits, looking like she's still reluctant to leave.

"No, even if you say that, we're in the same school, so we can do this anytime, right?"

"I see... I see! That's right!"

I didn't think about that at all! Ako's eyes glittered with that thought.

Indeed; Master speaks while nodding.

"Understood, then shall we establish this as a weekly event?"

"Spare me if we're having this weekly. I feel like my dark side will be drawn out into my daily life if I were to be dyed in your colors any further."

"You're gone too far with that line alone. Calling it your dark side and all."

"Oops, not good, that was dangerous. Geeks are gross, geeks are gross, geeks are gross, geeks are gross."

What's that, some sort of charm?

I enjoyed it to the very end even after we got to the station.

Counter to the tension from when everyone saw each other's faces, a tender, warm air seemed like it would envelop us forever.

We wait for a good time to part along the wall a short distance from the waves of people streaming past the ticket gates—my mouth was open before I knew it.

“I don’t know how to say this, but sorry.”

The word I got out was one of apology.

“Why are you apologizing, Rusian?”

Ako looks up at me curiously.

“My wife” closes in to a distance within my hands’ reach, one far closer than what could be considered the distance between friends, without any wariness at all.

Right, she was part of the reason too.

“See, honestly, I thought everyone was male.”

“Aah, that, huh?”

Master showed a rare, gentle smile and slowly nodded.

“I even made sure to mention that I was an actual JK in real life, but I see you did not even have the slightest trace of trust in me.”

“Of course I didn’t!”

Who would believe that?!

“You had an amazing face on at the start.”

“I blame you for most of that.”

Schw was a surprise too.

To think she always went on with that arrogance and manly persona.

“Also, I thought it would be a little awkward after we gathered.”

“Can I enter the conversation as the only male? Won’t I be left out? Was that what you thought?”

Master smiles.

“Yep, I was completely nervous at the start. But—it was fun.”

Recalling how truly enjoyable this half of the day was, I peered up towards the night skies sunk in darkness.

“See, I thought whatever happens in games should be kept there, whatever happens in real life should be kept there, and that they were completely different. That it’s best to not lump them together, to separate them as much as possible. I mean, someone nice in-game could be the worst in real life, or someone nice in real life could be the worst in-game. I’ve always heard about stories like that.”

It really happens often.

There’s that bunch who are rational in RL but thinks anything goes when in games; or those men who freely flatter others in-game but turn out to be despicable bastards after meeting them; there are too many of such types to count.

“But after actually meeting up like this, I really enjoyed myself. I thought, ‘Aah, my comrades are truly best, both in-game and in real life’.”

Slowly turning down, I bowed to my comrades around me.

“That’s why—sorry for not trusting in all of you at the start. Also, thanks.”

Schw suddenly broke out in laughter at my serious words.

“That’s disgusting! Not to mention gross!”

“Isn’t that too much?!”

She let out those words that ruined mine.

“It’s not. I would react the same no matter whether you tell me that in real life or in-game.”

“I mean, sure, that might be true, but still!”

Damn, I shouldn’t have apologized.

“Bhh... fufufu, hahahahaha.”

“Master, you’re laughing too hard!”

You’re no better than her!

“N-No, no. I won’t fault you for that. I did doubt you, wondering whether you were the type of man to send lewd looks at just any girl when I first saw you too, Rusian. That makes us even.”

Master spoke, looking as though she was holding her laughter in.

What do you take me for, geez.

“...But.”

And Schw pull me to her with the nape of my neck before she spoke with an apathetic look that made chills run down my back.

“If you try acting friendly to me at school too, I won’t show you any mercy, got it? Understood?”

“So you’re continuing that persona at school... u-understood.”

“Very good.”

Turning me about, Schw changed her expression to a smile.

Y-You’re close. Your face’s close. Her face really is cute, looking at it from this close. Her face, that is.

My head, in a fluster from being in close proximity with a girl’s smile, was pulled back a jerk.

“Woah.”

And something soft envelops the back of my back.

It’s warm, soft, and smells really good.

“Mgh!”

That pouty voice rings out right above me.

E-Erm, Ako-san?

Just what are you doing? Or rather, why are you glaring at Schw so?

“Ah, Ako?”

“...Mgh!”

“Nah, I won’t be taking your husband even without you threatening me or anything.”

I don’t need him. Schw turned her eyes towards Master after leaving those rude words.

“Right?”

“Certainly.”

After exchanging wry smiles, the pair walked off towards the ticket gates together.

“Until next time. Feel welcome to call me Master if you see me in school!”

“No, I’ll call you president! Well then, see you!”

They call out a light farewell and continue on into the station.

The pair vanished from our sights before Ako finally released me. While I am relieved, thanks to being released from the discomfort of my half-bent body, it does feel a little regrettable sensing Ako separating from me.

—So, erm, Ako-san, why are you glaring at me?

I stared back in silence and Ako spoke in a small voice.

“Rusian, did you really think I was male?”

“...Sorry, to be honest, I even thought you were some old guy.”

“Why would you?!”

Ako shouted out with the most anger she shown this entire day after I spilled my honest thoughts. It wasn’t very loud as her quiet appearance suggests, but its strength still made me back off.

“I said I was a girl, didn’t I?! Why didn’t you believe me?!”

“That’s, well... it just came to mind and I never reconsidered it.”

“You aren’t reflecting on it now either, are you?”

“I-I’m very sorry.”

B-But, you see. I do think there are some parts where you can't blame me for thinking so.

No one would normally think their wife's some cute girl and I have that old trauma too. It's more comforting on my mental health to assume it's male too, right?

However, Ako shows no sign of being appeased and even vehemently argues.

“In the first place, Rusian, why did you agree to marry if you thought I was male?”

“That's, look... I thought that would be fine too.”

“E-Eeh?!”

“No-no, not in that sense!”

I say to the flustering Ako whose eyes widened.

“I really think of real life and in-game as separate. That's why even if you're male outside the game, I thought it would be fine since you're Ako to me in-game.”

I only thought of this after saying that, but that doesn't seem much different.

Ako's probably creeped out—or so I thought.

“Is that... because you love ‘me’?”

“.....Well, yeah.”

M-Must you ask that?

Aware that my face turned red, I avert my eyes from Ako and nod.

Waah, this is ridiculously embarrassing. Why am I being shamed in a place like this?

“Then Rusian, you mean you fell in love with ‘me’, without concern for where I live, how old I am, my face, or even my gender? Just ‘me’?”

“Y-Yes, that’s right.”

That’s essentially correct.

Ako stared hard at me and my timid reply—and gave a fluffy, melted smile.

“Rusian, me too!”

“O-Oh?!”

Ako firmly caught hold of my two hands and repeatedly swung them up and down.

Ako’s hands were really warm. And soft.

That warmth spread through my hands as though to melt them, to wrap them up.

“I want to be with you, Rusian, because you’re you too. Even if you weren’t a boy my age living nearby, even if you were completely different from my imagination, I would definitely still love you! This is the truth, please believe me.”

“T-Thanks, Ako.”

Ako said so with tears in her eyes, it seems she really was glad. Erm, how should I take that?

Ako would love me even if I was different from the “Rusian” in her mind... does that mean I wasn’t much different from me in her imagination?

And even if I was different, she would still love me—

“No, that’s not it, calm down. Games and real life are different, games and real life are different, games and real life are different...”

“? Rusian?”

I gently released Ako’s hands, telling her that it was nothing.

It really is embarrassing, with people now looking due to our earlier clamor.

“It’s getting late. Let’s go back.”

“But I still...”

“I have to get back. C’mon.”

Ako gave an unsatisfied *uhh*, but nodded obediently in the end.

“Rusian, see you tomorrow... no, later! I’ll try to not be a burden today!”

“Y-Yeah. Take care on your way back.”

“Yes, then, :wave:!”

“Waving isn’t something you say out loud when going off in real life!”

Ako disappeared into the station, waving her hand non-stop.

Waving back, I wonder if we looked like a pair of close lovers from the side; I sense a few glances and hear some giggles.

Ako and I aren't like that, this is our first time meeting.

And despite that, it feels like we're so close—

I wonder what's this niggling sense of discomfort?

To put it in scale, yes, it's like I stepped down hard onto an absurdly large landmine.

“I-I should get back quick. Yep, time to go.”

I set off back in a hurry as though averting my eyes from something.

+++ +++ +++

□ Schwein: Hahaha, Ako's control is even worse than usual, lol.

□ Ako: I'm trying my best, though...

□ Apricot: There are times when it's fruitless even with effort, don't worry about it, Ako.

□ Schwein: Look at me not care at all, lol. It's no problem for me, lol.

□ Rusian: Aah, yeah, don't worry about it. All that's happening is my EXP dropping like a rock from the death penalties.

□ Ako: I'm sorry, Rusiann

□ Rusian: ...I'm kidding, just kidding.

On the night of the offline meeting, we gathered and set out on a hunt as usual, but Ako's control was clearly worse than always. I pity my character for having to suffer through that.

Still, it's within the margin of error for Ako's usual level of control, though that's not any more comforting. Besides, when

I think about Ako—Tamaki-san—in tears beyond the monitor, I feel like I can forgive her.

Despite vindicating myself by saying games and RL are different so often, I find myself tending towards self-gratification.

And upon finishing our hunting and returning to the town, sitting at our usual seats, Ako sat by my side as always.

□ Ako: Good job, Rusian.

□ Rusian: Nn, same to you.

It should have our usual pattern, but my heart's beating faster on its own upon recalling the girl who sat beside me today.

Calm down, calm down, that one's the RL Ako and this one's My Wife Ako.

But I was a little surprised we could game normally like this.

After actually meeting up and knowing each other in person, finding out we're the same age and in the same year, I figured we might not be able to continue calling each other comrades, my wife, or my husband.

We only maintained this comfortable space because we didn't know each other IRL. By meeting and finding out we weren't that far apart, a single person's emotions would be enough to change everything—I had that worry.

And, a bubble showed up atop Master.

□ Apricot: Well then, it's about time I take my leave. I have something on from the morning.

□ Schwein: You mean, at school? Ah... oops.

□ Apricot: Indeed, that's correct.

Master nods without showing any concern towards the RL topic that slipped out from Schw.

□ Apricot: Though I am less busy than everyone may believe as the president, there are busy times as well. Feel welcome to call me Master whenever you see me in school.

□ Schwein: How shameless a girl do you think I am?!

□ Rusian: Hey, Schw, your real side's showing!

□ Schwein: S-Someone of my magnificent caliber couldn't possibly do something so ditzy! S-Something so stupid!

□ Rusian: Calm down! You're slipping up everywhere!

□ Apricot: Hahaha, thank you for the laughter before I go to sleep. Now then, let us meet another day.

Saying what she had to say, Master disconnected without further ado.

That person really doesn't change. Her presence of mind's amazing.

□ Ako: I'll go take a bath and sleep, then.

Those words from Ako make an image of the Tamaki-san I met today taking a shower come to mind—for an instant right before I drown it out.

RL and games are different, RL and games are different.

□ Rusian: Thanks for today.

□ Schwein: Make sure you wash all the mud off yourself.

□ Rusian: She's not a pig like you, Schwein-san.

□ Schwein: Don't call this magnificent specimen a pig! Argh, you're so annoying!

□ Rusian: You're really mixing them up.

□ Schwein: I-It's tough doing this after you saw my face!

Well, yeah, duh.

And I can't stop grinning whenever I think about her face speaking with such swagger.

□ Ako: Then, good night.

□ Rusian: Yeaaa

After I saw off Ako, disappearing while waving her hand, Schw suddenly spoke up.

□ Schwein: Aah, also. I told you earlier, but if you try getting all buddy-buddy with me just because we know each other a bit more now, I'll seriously kill you, got that?"

□ Rusian: I can tell that much. I won't tell anyone and I won't change my attitude towards you either.

□ Schwein: Really? I'm counting on you, okay?

Segawa says anxiously, or perhaps unsatisfied.

Her manner of speech's completely messed up now.

What's with that, does she have that little trust in me?

□ Rusian: Games and RL are different. Just because I'm close to Schw in-game doesn't mean I'll stick to Segawa IRL.

□ Schwein: Oh? That's good, then.

□ Rusian: Yeah, don't worry.

After making Rusian do an exaggerated bow, Segawa made Schw shrug his shoulders and a chat message showed up.

□ Schwein: Why are you trying to say it in such a cool manner, like you understand everything? Gross!

□ Rusian: Leave me alone!

How should I say this? Those words fit the usual Segawa to a tee.

But still, that, well, didn't annoy me. At all. I would get pissed if Segawa says that to me, but it's nothing when I treat it from Schw. It doesn't just depend on the words but the person, huh.

No, I mean, they are one and the same, though.

□ Schwein: Also... you better not get too close to Ako either. I would pity her if any strange rumors of her spread.

□ Rusian: Don't say it like you pity her if she gets into a rumor related to me... nah, that would be pitiful, yeah.

□ Schwein: I know, right?

It really wouldn't be any good for Ako. This is the harsh reality for an open geek.

And after a short pause, Schw goes like the usual Segawa.

□ Schwein: ...I won't mind supporting you if you intend to date Ako for real, though?

□ Rusian: I won't!

I firmly asserted in a fluster.

□ Rusian: Something like seducing a girl you meet online into becoming your girlfriend just doesn't happen.

□ Schwein: But you looked like some e-flirt from the sidelines today.

□ Rusian: Don't point that outttttt!

□ Schwein: lolol

Schw laughed, likely not saying it seriously, but my mental state was close to vomiting my dinner.

E-flirt.

The worst name possible.

The name for trash.

The name of those I hated.

Those named e-flirts carry out one simple task. They would call out to females in-game, flirt with them, flatter them, and pressure them into meeting with them in RL.

Those flirts waste no time in flirting, starting their flirting as soon as they can.

They are the most detested existence within online games.

I'm no flirt, I'm not some flirt!

□ Schwein: Well, it doesn't matter. Make sure you come to an understanding with Ako about how much distance you plan to put between the two of you.

□ Rusian: Will do.

□ Schwein: Then, I'll be getting out first, bro.

□ Rusian: ...So you're keeping that personality?

□ Schwein: Be quiet, you.

After glaring this way, Schw disappeared.

Still, I certainly need to put some distance between Ako and I, huh?

That clearly wasn't the atmosphere between friends when we parted earlier.

“But...”

The desire to say nothing extra and keep the status quo rears its ugly head.

I'm on good terms with Ako. We were like longtime acquaintances when we met just today too.

Shouldn't it be fine not creating that distance with my words, considering I have no need to do so?

I mean, look, the Ako I actually met was so cute.

Tamaki-san's face surfaced in my mind, directing an abashed expression at me.

“—No!”

Those are exactly the kinds of thoughts!

That drives men into flirting!

And made me confess to a GIRL!

Ending the game in a hurry, I shut the computer down and leapt into my bed.

Games and RL are different, games and RL are different—I tried going to sleep with that in mind, but all that shows up in my mind is Tamaki-san's face, peering up at me like an over-attached cat.

Regardless of my attempts at shaking my head to shake that off, it firmly clung on like Ako herself.

Rusian, Rusian, Rusian...

#### **Localization / Translation Notes**

##### **“umaibou”**

Corn snack. Literally “delicious stick”. ([more info](#))

##### **“GIRL”**

Guy In Real Life. ([more info](#))

##### **“scale of b’s”**

Scale of billions.

In Japanese (MMOs), they use k, m, and g for units, translated to kilo, mega, and giga, the metric prefixes.

The equivalent in English would be k, m, and b, but they are kilo, million, and billion instead. ([more info](#))

##### **“JK”**

Joushi kousei. Female high school student. ([more info](#))

##### **“Shin Offline Meeting: Imagine”**

From “Shin Megami Tensei: Imagine”. ([more info](#))

##### **“Schwein / Schw / Segawa”**

Segawa talks in a manly, arrogant tone when in her Schwein

persona.

She addresses herself as *oresama* and sometimes ends sentences with *da ze*. ([more info](#))

It's pretty impossible to translate that with gender-neutral English, so I just upped the arrogance on most of her lines when needed.

On a side note, it's pronounced *shuvein* in Japanese and the "schw" in Schw-chan would be just *shu*.

### **“mai waifu / my wife”**

Localized from 「俺の嫁」 (*ore no yome*).

While “mai waifu” is usually a good substitute for *ore no yome*, it usually refers to a fictional character that perhaps exist in the partner's heart.

But Ako's considered an actual person in this series.

Hence, I usually translated it to “my wife” in those cases (which happens a lot more). ([more info](#))

### **“Geek”**

Localized from 「オタク」 (*otaku*).

*Otaku* effectively refers to people with an obsessive interest with some certain theme, mainly the *anime* and *manga* fandom.

In this case, it would be mainly games and the general concept of being one, so I simply went with “geek”. ([more info](#))

### **“Socially apt / Normalfag / Winning at life”**

Localized from 「リア充」 (*riajuu*).

*Riajuu* refers to people with a successful real life, formed from the words “ria” (real life) and “juujitsu” (fulfilled).

It's somewhat different from the usual definition of a

“normalfag”, so I added adjectives instead of doing a 1:1 swap. ([more info](#))

### “Burontism”

The following line(s) / phrase(s) originate from a FFXI player named “Buront”. ([more info](#))

“main tank here! now we can won!”

“my lifespan was already mach from stress!”

### “take it easy!”

From the “Yukkuri Shiteitte ne!” meme. ([more info](#))

### “gold digger character”

Localized from 「姫プレイ」 (Hime play).

*Hime play* (*hime*'s “princess”) refers to the playstyle of creating female characters and making use of men who instinctively protect them, give them presents, etc.

### “lol”

Localized from 「www」.

www is effectively just the Japanese “lol”, originating from the “w” of “warau” (laugh).

The localization is done based on the length, adding an additional “ol” for each set of “www”. ([more info](#))

In the segment in the cafe, it actually went like this:

“Come to think of it, how are those ‘double-u-double-u-double-u’ letters people always use read?”

“That’s short for *world wide web*.”

“That’s not what it means, right? Isn’t that read as *warau*?”

“Also, ‘www’ comes in set of three and is read as *terawaro*.”

“On a side note, I am personally one of those who read it as *dub-dub-dub*.”

“—Come on, I need someone to punch a wall!”

“Wall punching agent at your service! We’ll punch any wall near you in your place!”

Localized from 「壁殴り代行始」 (kabe naguri daikou).

This is a meme unique to Japan about hiring someone to hit a wall for you to express your frustration.

The origin appears to be threads about FEZ, an online game, where someone went, “(‘・ω・’) Haa, I ended up hitting the wall again,” in reaction to a series of pathetic updates.

This eventually led to a copypasta about starting up a business for the hitting of walls to spare the troubled from the trouble of hurting themselves or even finding a wall to hit. ([more info](#))

“:wave:”

Localized from 「ノシ」 (no shi).

After Tamaki verbalizes *no shi*, Nishimura points out that it’s not meant to be said out.

“no shi” wouldn’t make any sense unless the reader understands katakana, so I localized it to “:wave:”.

“E-flirt”

Localized from 「直結厨」 (chokketsu chuu).

*Chokketsu* means “direct connection”.

This term refers to those who constantly seek “direct connections” with people they meet online, asking them out or getting some direct means of communication.

Naturally, this works a lot better when you’re not operating on a global scale.

They also tend to think with the lower half of their body rather than their top half.

It honestly has a much harsher connotation than “e-flirt”, but there seems to be no real equivalent for it.

The slang term, “player”, may work well, but it doesn’t work at all in a story about online gaming... ([more info](#))

## **Master of Modern Communications-Electronics Recreation Club**

Translation of Netoge no Yome wa Onnanoko ja nai to Omotta?’s volume 1, chapter 2.

Translation and localization notes are available at the bottom, but try to finish the chapter before that.

First thing in the morning after I decided to treat it as an usual day.

“...G-Good morning, Nishimura.”

“.....”

It didn’t go as planned from the very start.

The one who greeted with that distinctively shrill voice as I sat at my seat was Schw... no, Segawa.

Hey, you, why didn’t you just ignore someone like me if you’re going screw up that bad? Was it due to some weird pride of yours?

Without any choice, I return the greeting as normal as I can.

“M-Morning, Segawa.”

Yep, totally normal.



I was personally satisfied with how safe my reply was.

“Hah? What’s with you talking to me all of a sudden?”

But Segawa spat that out with an obviously displeased face.

“Wait, isn’t that way too unreasonable on your part?!”

Weren’t you the one who greeted me?! That was considerably reckless, going by your usual self!

“What, wait... I told you not to get involved with me like that, didn’t I?!”

“Wasn’t that your fault?! That conversation flow was definitely weird!”

“You’re the worst, why would you nit-pick those details?”

“Oh, that one was pretty Segawa-ish. I’ll give that eighty points.”

“Like I said, just...”

Female Student A, whose name I forgot, came beside us while we talked.

“Hehe. You’re close as ever today, too, aren’t you, Nishimura-kun, Akane-chan?”

And who are you supposed to be? I really am getting used to holding down these thoughts.

Hiding how I don’t even know her name, I put on a face and replied.

“Well, we definitely are.”

I answered with what would clearly be a joke to anyone who knew the usual us.

However, it seemed Segawa didn't take it as such.

“Wha... how I possibly be on good terms with someone as revolting as him?! That's just stupid!”

“O-Ohh?!”

“A-Akane-chan?”

Segawa sure shouted that one out loud.

Loud enough to send everyone in the class and the entire classroom into silence.

“Ah, erm...”

The silent gazes focused this way from all around petrify Segawa, Female Student A, and I.

The tangible pressure from the countless eyes makes me lower my head in a fluster.

“S-Sorry, Segawa. That was my fault.”

I properly apologize with everyone's eyes on me.

“I'm sorry too, Akane.”

“Eh, no...”

Segawa flounders with the developments likely exceeding her expectations.

The gazes shot at her from all around said, “Oh man, Nishimura's really pitiful there. That was awful of Segawa too”.

I must have looked pitiful from our classmates' perspective since they don't know anything. But that wasn't how this was. That was just a slight quarrel between a pair who knew each other's limits pretty well.

But I can't explain that. After all, we'll end up with the trouble of the topic automatically shifting towards LA.

“——You're really annoying!”

Letting that out, Segawa roughly threw her belongings onto her own seat.

Aah, scary. And sorry, really.

That said, I can't quite claim to be the one at fault, too, though.

“I'm sorry, Nishimura-kun, it was because I went and said that, that...”

“Nah, I'm used to it. Hahaha...”

Female Student A who quickly lowered her head is actually pretty cute upon closer inspection. Though I can't even remember her name.

“Hahaha, what are you, some suicidal hero like Maeda?”

“What's with that? It's nothing like that.”

“Hey, don't say that, he's alright, he got that waifu of his and all.”

“Isn't she missing a dimension?”

“That missing dimension is what Nishimura looks for, right?”

The males approach me, perhaps to console me after being shouted at by a bad-tempered classmate.

Aah, what great friends. If only they could install a filter on their words, that is.

“Geez, saying all you like... hey, you, my bride’s surprisingly cute. Not to mention devoted to me.”

“Yeah, yeah, she is, isn’t she?”

“We get it, we get it.”

“Listen to me! Stop looking at me with those considerate eyes!”

“There you are, Rusian!”

A voice, clear as a bell’s chime, echoed throughout the classroom and tore into our conversation.

A voice unfamiliar yet known.

The voice originated from the classroom’s entrance. I turn my eyes; the one there is a petite female student whose black hair almost hid her eyes—eh, huh, Ako?

“A... Tamaki-san?”

I stopped myself before calling out Ako. That was close. It’ll be trouble if my classmates find me calling out her given name without any real connection between us.

Let’s overcome this by playing ignorant.

“She’s not from this class, is she?”

“Huh, she’s pretty cute, you don’t know her?”

“Nope, I’ve no info on her. Maybe I don’t see her much at school?”

“...So, Rusian? Who’s that?”

That one word sends a jolt through my body.

“W-Who knows. I wonder?”

M-My character name's being called out. And in front of all of my classmates.

Crap, this is embarrassing. It's super embarrassing, on the same scale as that self-introduction.

It feels like some dark history that I never wanted anyone to see, both now and forever, is being divulged.

Besides, why is Ako here? If you have something to ask of me, I'll listen to it later, so leave for now, please, I'm begging you!

“...! ...!!”

I exchange glances with Ako, pleading for her to return with my eyes.

Ako grin brightly at that.

“Good morning, Rusian!”

And totters straight to my desk.

Why?! I could communicate with Master and Schw through our eyes! Why can't my bride, Ako, understand?!

“...Eh, Nishimura, you know her?”

“No, I don't really...”

Ako came before me before I could finish my excuse.

Her face, showing a cheerful smile, seems to peek into mine.

“So you were in Class 2, Rusian? I was looking for you since I didn’t ask for your class, Rusian, and went through most of the classes.”

Ako smoothly continues while I look down, shaking my head in denial.

Aaah, damn, the classroom’s getting quieter and quieter.

I can just sense all the eyes gathering onto me.

Stop it, you’re killing me! I’ll die from the shame!

Aaah, the gazes are coming and they’re saying, “What, Nishimura calls himself Rusian? Woah, how much of a geek is he, lol”! I can’t take it! Even an open geek like me has things I can endure and things I can’t!

And a friend by my side opens his mouth at last.

“Rusian... you?”

“Waaaah, no, that’s not it, how do I say this, it’s like a pet name, or something, or how do I say this, it’s something like that!”

Stop it!

D-Don’t look at me!

Don’t look at this now-Rusian me!

“W-Waa...”

A glance her way shows Segawa’s watching Ako with a pale, dazed look.

Well, of course she would, no one really think they would encounter something like this, like some traffic accident.

“Pet name... huh, so you are close to her? Which class is she from?”

“That’s not it, we aren’t like that, you see.”

“Rusian, listen to me too. What is the matter, Rusian, why are you looking down? Could it be that you’re feeling sick, Rusian? Are you okay, Rusian? Rusiaan?”

“Hey, how many times do you have to call out Rusian?!”

“Kyaan-”

I yelled after swiping my face upwards. Who can fake their way out of this hell of having one’s character name called out, over and over again, so loudly in front of one’s classmates?!

“Besides, why are you here?!”

“B-But...”

Ako continued, directing an embarrassed smile at my glare.

“I couldn’t stay up too late with you last night, so I wanted to meet you as early as I could, Rusian...”

“?!”

A jitter ran through.

The silenced classroom suddenly erupts.

“Nishimura, youuuuuu! So you’ve betrayed us, you bastard?!”

“Aaaaahh, what are you saying, Ako?! That’s not it, it’s not like that, really!”

“What’s not like that, she’s totally calling out your name, isn’t she?!”

My classmate grips my collar, jerking it upwards, and shakes me. Sure, he's probably not serious with that smile, but still, that means he's not going to hold back with the teasing.

Crap, I'll have to dodge this somehow or—

“Ah, please, stop that! Don't bully my Rusian!”

“M-'My'... she said 'my'.”

The face gripping my collar trembled.

Ako's voice changed, a sense of desperation akin to that of a small, frightened animal menaced filling it. A sincere voice that makes one feel guilt-ridden simply upon hearing it.

“E-Erm, hey there. Just what do you have to do with this guy?”

“Ah... wait, that question should—”

That question sent shivers down my back for some reason.

We can't avoid exposing that we're comrades in a game, at least, after that whole uproar.

Rather, the mayhem shouldn't grow any further if Ako gave that honest answer now. *Aah, so you're geeky friends*; it would be like that.

And yet what is this intense, foreboding premonition?

That presentiment must have, yes, it must have come from Ako, firmly glaring at my classmate despite her flushed face.

“I'm... Rusian is my important husband.”

“Nishimuraaaaaa!”

“Waaaaah!”

*Kyaa! She said “husband”?! I heard shouts from the girls.*

Everyone in the class got caught up in the explosive excitement.

This isn't any good, she's no good, this is all seriously not good!  
It's gone beyond what I can cope with!

I resigned myself to deal with this hell until the chime, but someone came before me.

“Hold on, Tamaki-san!”

“S-Segawa!”

A twin tailed savior had arrived.

“Geez, what's with all this noise this early? I don't know anything about Rusian or whatever husband you'd invented in your head, but how about bringing your geeky business outside? Don't get everyone else involved in it.”

“...R-Right.”

How could it be? The chaos throughout the class died down within an instant.

Segawa, who had said that with a sullen look, seems even like an angel at times like this.

Segawa's words helped me out on multiple fronts.

She shifted away the suspicion on the relationship between Tamaki-san and me by placing the Rusian calling and thing about the husband under the usual geeky label while chasing Ako and I out from the classroom with her attitude today that everyone thought was bent out of shape.

“.....Hmm.”

Segawa flashed me a wink out of everyone else's sight.

She's good, she's really good!

That was masterfully done, Segawa—no, that wasn't Segawa. That was Schw. My friend, Schwein, who overcame life-and-death crises by my side time and time again!

“See? Let's go outside like she said, I'll hear you out there.”

However. That consideration was of absolutely no use on Ako.

“Ah, good morning, Schw-chan.”

“?!”

The few words released from Ako's mouth after her expression relaxed were capable of bringing various things to ruin.

“Huh, Schw-chan, so you were in the same class as Rusian? It must be nice being together...”

“Wait, can you...”

“...Schw-chan?”

“Hgh!”

Segawa convulses at that voice from somewhere in the class.

Nonchalantly wiping off the cold sweat pouring out, Segawa pats Ako's shoulder. *Listen, you get it, don't you, don't talk back.* Her eyes seem to convey that.

“I-I don't know what you're talking about, but let's settle it outside, shall we? Now, let's get out of the classroom. I'm telling you, go out. You understand, don't you?”

“Eh, huh? Schw-chan, are you mad?”

“T-That’s enough out of you, Ako, now, let’s go...”

Segawa’s hand tries to tug on Ako’s arm, but whizzes only through the empty air.

Ako had grandly clapped her hands together.

“Ah, I get it. It’s because I hadn’t called you right, isn’t it? Good morning, Schwein-san. I see you aren’t going with your usual look-at-this-great-me today. Ah, could it be related to what you said yesterday about that hidden dark side appearing when you’re Schwein...”

“Noooooooooooooo!”

Segawa let out a cry of despair.

I would have taken a screenshot to be save this impressive degree of despair on her face for all eternity if this is in the game.

“C-Calm down, Schw! You shouldn’t be yelling here!”

“Don’t you dare add more fuel to the fire too!”

“Eh, what, the three of you all know each other...?”

Female Student A says, stunned with surprise.

“We don’t, it’s nothing even close to that! Hey, anyway, come here! I’m telling you, comeeee!”

After that outburst towards Female Student A, Segawa grabs both Ako and my necks before walking out with tremendous strength.



Maybe it's that same ridiculous strength one gets during a fire on the brink of death, but she steadily pulls us both along.  
“Schw-chan? W-What's the matter?”

“Don't call me Schw-chaaaaan!”

Nonetheless, her face was dyed over with intense despair.

“Ako, just what are you playing at?”

Segawa pants with her shoulders heaving.

However, the interrogated, Ako speaks only a few words.

“What am I...? Erm, have I done anything strange?”

In a timid manner, wondering why she'd even asked.

“How about you try pointing out even one part of that earlier that wasn't strange?!”

“C-Calm down, Schw!”

“Don't call me Schw!”

“Schwein-san!”

“That's not what I meant!”

Segawa's already in tears.

I hold Segawa's shoulder in a fluster and pats it as I speak.

“O-Okay, Segawa. First of all, calm down. Stop panicking. Also, how do I say this, sorry for getting you caught up in that magnificent self-destruction.”

“No kidding! I don't need that weird sympathy from you!”

Segawa hugs her own head. Oh, and Ako's peering on with a troubled look.

“R-Rusian, why is Schw-chan so angry? Did I trouble her so much just by calling out to her...?”

She asks me in an afraid manner.

Judging from her cowering and trembling, is she truly unaware?

“That’s not it. It’s because you were calling her Schw or Schwein.”

“Eh... I shouldn’t have?”

“Isn’t that obvious?!”

Segawa bangs on the corridor’s wall.

Hey, how about we leave the wall hitting to a professional? Look, I bet your hand hurts.

“Then how should I call...”

“Couldn’t you have just called me normally by Segawa-san or Akane-chan?”

“Eeeh?!”

Ako spoke with growing surprise.

“But Schw-chan’s Schw-chan to me!”

“I’m Segawa Akane!”

“Calm down, Segawa. Ako, you see, Rusian and Schwein are just our in-game names, and we do have our names in real life,

right? Think about the time and place, there's one for everything and all. Please call us by our proper names.”

“But the ones I'm friends with are Rusian and Schw-chan...”

“We aren't in the game, so that's not the issue here, it doesn't matter what we are to you.”

“Games and real life are different, aren't they, Ako?”

Ako's eyes widened after we spoke while sighing.

“Eh, why is that?”

“Eh?”

“Eh?”

What's that? That's scary.

We send question marks at each other as all three of us exchange looks.

“A-Ako?”

“What are you saying?”

“Eh, am I the strange one?!”

Ako said with her eyes widened before taking a halting step towards us.

“Games are different... then are we just fellow students in the same year, Schw-chan? We aren't even friends? Despite how we'd always played together and how we'd talked day after day?”

“No, that's...”

Turning her eyes away from the hesitating Segawa and towards me, Ako speaks while tears surface within them.

“Are we just strangers with nothing connecting the both of us, Rusian? Despite how I’d said I love you and how you’d said you love me? Despite how you’d married me?!”

“Like we said, Ako...”

I exchange a glance with Segawa.

(W-What should we do?)

(She’s your bride, you do something about her.)

(That’s pretty difficult. A-Anyway, I’ll try pacifying her.)

(k)

We converse with merely our sights and I immediate turn towards Ako.

“We are definitely not just mere acquaintances or fellow students in the same year, you know?”

“Aah, that’s only natural, considering how long we played together.”

“Y-You’re lying! Please stop it! You intend to say something horrible to me now, right? **Just like in a doujin! Just like in a doujin!**”

Tightly hugging her hands to her chest, Ako shouted out as though unable to hold back her thoughts.

What are you blurting out at school?!

“We won’t! You are our friend and our important guildmate too. Isn’t that just obvious?!”

“I think so too. And you’re my important bride in the game too!”

On a side note, waah, that’s super embarrassing.

I thought I would never have the chance to claim someone’s my wife face-to-face in this life.

“Then why were the both of you angry? Was it my fault?”

Ako spoke with upturned eyes, perhaps having cooled down slightly.

“Like I said, I don’t like having my in-game name called out in real life. I’m going with a character that would never touch games... let alone online games. I would be troubled if you were to call me with that Western name.”

“Yeah, it’s pig and all.”

“You shut up.”

Segawa glares at me for that unnecessary comment.

Though there aren’t anyone in this corner of the corridor, students in the same grade can still be seen in the distance. This is no place for us to let our guard down.

“Then, what should I do?”

“There’s no need to think too hard about it. Just call me normally by my name. Segawa’s fine, Akane’s okay too.”

“Se... Segawa. San.”

“Yes, Tamaki-san.”

Ako called out Segawa’s name, timidly for some reason, and Segawa finally smiled and answer.

“We are, friends?”

“Of course we are, what are you saying?”

“...Thank goodness.”

Ako, too, shows a smile akin to a flower blooming. But on the other hand, Segawa lets out a deep sigh. She must be rather tired. Well, it helps me out too if she understands.

“You can call me normally with Nishimura too.”

“N-Nishimura-kun.”

“Yeah, Ako... no, Tamaki-san.”

“Ako’s fine, though?”

“That’s not such a good idea.”

“I want you to call me Ako.”

“That’s, well, how about we get to know each other a little more before that?”

I frankly can’t call out a girl’s given name in front of other guys.

“Then I’ll keep calling you Rusian!”

“I’m very sorry, Ako-san!”

That would be way too embarrassing!

Caressing me to comfort me after I hung my head down in melancholy, Ako lets out a happy voice.

“That’s why I love you, Rusian.”

“Like I said, it’s Nishimura.”

A smiling Ako fills my sight as I lift my head. Was I just being too light on my bride with this willingness to forgive everything upon seeing that face?

“Floormat...”

“Shush.”

It'll be like I'm pointlessly conscious of it if I refuse after being asked by her to call her so. Though I would like to justify that by saying it'll jumble up games and real life.

“Look, the bell's ringing, let's hurry back.”

“Yes! So, Schw-chan... Segawa-san, I can talk to you anytime I want?!”

Bounding across to Segawa, Ako takes her hands and speaks.

“Well, that's fine, but stop it with the online games talk or Internet talk when we're at school.”

“E-Eeh?!”

Those hands turned stiff in an instant at that.

“T-That's impossible!”

“Why?”

“I mean, there's nothing else we can talk about...”

Ako says, apparently really disappointed.

“Y-You're just...”

“Ako... that's just too sad.”

Even I lost the strength in my shoulders. Segawa was hugging her head too.

Though I can't see Ako's expression, hidden by her longish fringe, her terrible depression's obvious from her tone alone. Ako, just how do you get along in your class—

Ah, that's right. That made me remember!

I was thinking that I had seen Ako somewhere; we met at the schoolwide assembly.

That girl who turned ridiculously frightened after I bumped into her, that was Ako, wasn't it?! She was willing to show me her face at the offline meeting, so I'd never found out!

“W-What should I do...”

Ako, who said that on the verge of tears, was clearly the girl from that day.

So that means Ako usually passes her time like that?

W-Well, sure, it would stand to reason why she really doesn't have any friends.

“Then there's no need to force yourself. We can talk all we like in LA.”

“No way...”

Even throughout my revelation, Segawa says out something that must be tough for Ako to accept without any hesitation.

She grabs Ako's head and turns her towards me.

“In exchange, look, go spend time with your husband.”

“W-Why?!”

“You're alright even with online games talk, right?”

“I mean, yeah, but.”

“Really, Rusian? You’re okay with that, Rusian?”

No, I’m Nishimura.

I’ll leave correcting that for later.

“I would be okay with it. I would appreciate it if you cut down on the Rusians and it would trouble me being called your husband, but anything else goes.”

Ako may not have many friends right now, but she probably can make as many as she wants, considering those rapidly changing expressions of hers when she’s in our presence.

Also, frankly, it’s not like... I have... that many friends either.

“R-Rusiann!”

“Were you even listening to me?!”

“I’m glad. I knew you were my ally, Rusian. Rusian, Rusian!”

“Fix that part first!”

Ako trembles from emotion with both hands pulled together at her lips.

My anxiety for her engulfs me. Will she really be alright?

“Nishimura-kun, Segawa-san? What are you doing over there? I’ll be starting home room.”

And Saitou-sensei called out from down the corridor.

“Okaay, we’ll be right back!”

“Please dooo!”

That's right, that's right, we don't have the time now. It would probably cause a even larger disturbance if we don't return by the bell after that disturbance earlier.

"That's right, let's return seeing as we've settled this. Geez, I'm exhausted and it's still morning. I'll have to make everyone in class know it's Nishimura's fault later too."

"So you're making it my fault, huh... well, I don't mind. Ako, you okay? Do you know the way back?"

"Yes."

She properly replied.

*Alright;* I start walking.

"...Ah, Rusian."

Ako immediately pulls on my shirt's collar.

"Can you wait in your classroom during lunch break?"

"Sure, but what's up?"

"I made lunch, so let's have it together."

.....Huh?

I can see myself freezing up in some awkward position.

And Segawa, who had stood up and walked first, comes to a sharp stop.

"Ah, Ako, what are you saying?"

"I made your share, Rusian. I don't have too much confidence in it, though..."

Ako said that while looking up at me with slightly blushed cheeks.

The breeze blowing through the corridor sets her fringe aflutter. Her eyes are clearly wet, perhaps from her earlier tears, and they look straight at me.

“Why, would you do that?”

Ako answers with her eyes slightly trembling as I hear her out, unconsciously gulping down my saliva.

“Aren’t we husband and wife, Rusian?”

“.....That’s in-game, right?”

“? We did marry, didn’t we?”

*Huh?* Her words seem to truly express her inner bewilderment.

“...Hey, Nishimura, I’ve been thinking.”

“Aah, I’m on the same train of thought right now.”

I powerlessly reply to Segawa who had turned around with an exasperated look.

Crap, she’s—the opposite of me.

She’s not differentiating between in-game and real life even one bit with regards to human relationships.

“...What should we do?”

“Let’s contact Master... the president by phone. Sorry, but please leave your lunch break free too.”

“What’s happening, both of you? Have I said something strange again?”

“No... let’s have lunch together.”

Ako’s expression lit up like how some dejected cat whose name got called.

“Yes!”

Aah, she’s so cute.

She’s cute, really cute... but what should we do about this?

A call to Master got us an okay to go to the student council room during lunch break.

Really? The room doesn’t belong to you, right? I thought about that, but nowhere else came to mind.

After waiting for the lunch break, we visited the student council room.

“I see, so that was what happened?”

In the room devoid of anyone aside from us, Master grins and speaks after listening to our brief story.

“That sounds amusing indeed!”

“There’s nothing amusing about it!”

Can’t she imagine how terrible it got after that?

Our classmates came and asked about everything.

It just so happens that I play the same game as Tamaki-san and the character I made, “Rusian”, just so happens to be married to the character she made.

Yep, that’s as far as our relationship got: all in the game.

As for Segawa, Tamaki-san had mistaken my insulting of her as a pig and she's actually a complete victim, absolutely unrelated to us!

—Those were the desperate excuses we came up with.

“That took years off my life.”

“No kidding...”

Segawa and I are utterly exhausted.

“...I am very sorry.”

“No, we aren’t really hoping for an apology from you or anything.”

“You made lunch too, and all.”

Well, yeah.

I nudge the lunch Ako made in front of me.

I got a girl to make lunch for me—honestly, my heart’s pounding, experiencing this for the first time in my life.

“Lunch made by Ako, huh. I see, Ako feels it’s only natural to make lunch for her husband, Rusian?”

“Is it so strange?”

“I suppose it would not be considered normal.”

Master speaks, amused, betraying her own words.

“Ako and Rusian are certainly close, bonded together by a long acquaintance and mutual love. However, that applies only in the game. Not in reality. Would it not be akin to seriously loving one whom you knew neither the face nor name of?”

Master's words are only proper. But Ako refutes.

"That's not true!"

She violently shakes her head and speaks with resolve.

"All the more so; it's because I didn't know his face and name! I fell in love with Rusian after talking with him, always being with him, and confiding in him without any other connection between us. Our love is much, much more pure than those mountains of worthless socially apt normalfags!"

"...I see, I suppose I have to agree if you put it that way."

"Master, don't get caught up in her flow!"

"Oh, dear, my apologies."

Master offhandedly laughs.

"Still, would you not agree that she has a point? Ako says she truly loves your personality, without concern for your facial features, your voice, your height, your weight, or any other such factor. Is that not something to celebrate?"

"Like I said, don't get caught up!"

I stop Master who seems to be leaning towards Ako's side.

It's not as plain and simple as that.

"You're too naive, looking just at that personality alone thing. There are other factors involved in-game too, like the characters' outwards appearances or their combat capabilities, right? I'm always looking out for Ako, that's why she has a higher opinion of me than she actually should. She's not some unbiased judge."

“...Or so he says?”

Ako strongly shakes her head with the topic back to her.

“That’s not true at all. I’ve played with people aside from Rusian at times too, but everyone would leave, annoyed, before long. But Rusian always stayed with me. No matter how many times I failed, how many times, I forgot, how many—”

Ako speaks, looking at me with an embarrassed smile.

“That’s why I love him.”

“...Ako.”

She really is cute, isn’t she? There’s no info on her just because she wouldn’t properly look at and talk like this with anyone aside from us, right? That’s definitely it.

Come to think of it, Ako wouldn’t show this face to anyone aside from me, huh? I do feel sort of good about that, maybe. — N-no, that’s no good, though! That “I’m special to this girl, heh” line of thought is definitely no good, though!

“Ah, right, right, good luck with all that. I’ll be on my way back...”

And after saying that in a sullen tone as we stared at each other, Segawa stands from her seat.

“Geez, why are you wasting my lunch break in this sad manner, making me listen to you brag about your love?”

“No, no, wait, Segawa! It’ll turn for the worse if you leave too!”

I desperately hold Segawa back from leaving the student council room.

Seeing how Master's leaning towards Ako, I'll be all alone if Segawa were to up and leave too!

I cling onto her, but Segawa spits out words at me.

"Don't come any closer, you e-flirt."

"E-E... e-fl-fl... you..."

"That's right, that's what it turned out to be, didn't it?"

"I'm not, I'm...!"

"Not what? You called out to Ako in the game, met up with her, and made her..."

"Uwaaaaaaaaah, stop it, pleaseeeee!"

No way, I don't want that!

You can't go any lower than being called an e-flirt as an online game player!

"E-flirt? What's that?"

"That refers to those rotten males who scavenge for females without much experience with men and lay their hands on them."

"Don't say it out!"

I hugged my head while shouting out in tears.

No way, I'm definitely not becoming some e-flirt! I'll never accept being called one!

That sad incident will happen again if I do!

"Let's do this... let's do this, Ako!"

"D-Do what?"

Ako speaks with a shudder.

“We’ll change your way of thinking.”

“Change my... way of thinking?”

“Right.”

I nod with strength, tightly grasping her shoulders as she looks utterly bewildered.

“Hear me out, games and real life are different. I won’t deny there may be some things in common, but they are different. I will have you understand that, Ako.”

“W-Why must I understand such a horrifying... Rusian, you scumbag!”

“You actually hate me, don’t you?”

“No, no, I love you.”

Sure, your face’s saying it’s really obvious that you love me, but my belief in that’s sort of fading here.

“Well, words are cheap. What do you have planned?”

“Let’s see... It would be nice if there’s something that can show how different I am from Rusian in the game...”

*Hmm*; I ponder.

How exactly am I supposed to realize how I’m different from Rusian?

“Hmm, so you would only require her to experience the difference between games and real life?”

“Master, thought of something?”

“Aah, I thought up of a good idea, fufufufufu. Leave it all to me.”

Master smirked and brought out her phone before handling it with tremendous vigor.

“Can we really leave it up to her?”

“P-Probably.”

It's okay, right? Would be great if it really was okay...

+++ +++ +++

“The Modern Communications-Electronics Recreation Club...?”

We gathered after school in a corner of the building for clubs as indicated by Master.

What we saw there was a classroom with a brand new nameplate.

“Modern Communications-Electronics Recreation... wait.”

“Online games?”

That's it. Besides, it's Master calling us out, so it's something to do with that.

“Nishimura, was there a club like this in Maegasaki High School?”

“I would have entered if there was.”

“Well, you would.”

Segawa nods as well as though it's the most natural thing in the world.

Sure, it's true that I would have definitely entered. Still, it is a little annoying having you accept it that easily.

"I would have entered too, I guess?"

"Hey, Ako, you..."

Looks like I have friends. I'm conflicted over whether I should be glad over that or not, though.

"Geez. Even if there was one, I doubt it would have anything tailored for females. Besides, this used to be an empty room if my memory serves me right."

Segawa looked up at the nameplate and spoke in a doubtful tone.

"Why would you know?"

"I was in the Handicrafts Club next door. I remember the next room being empty."

Ooh, the Handicrafts Club? It doesn't seem to fit her, yet it does.

"...I wasn't making cosplay outfits or anything."

"You didn't have to point that out yet."

You're making me all that more suspicious.

Well, wearing something from nearly any *loli*-type character would probably fit her, though.

"And are you still in the Handicrafts Club?"

"I stopped. It gave me less time for games."

"You really are half-baked, huh?"

Now that she pointed it out, the Handicrafts Club really is next door.

In other words, this room should have unmistakably been empty until recently.

And as far as I can tell, this nameplate is fairly new. No, rather, it looks as though it was put on just today—

“My apologies, it appears I have kept you waiting?”

And a familiar, refined voice came from behind.

Turning about, I see Master showing a calm smile.

“It took some time settling the application. Fortunately, there weren’t any issues.”

She spoke while fiddling with the key she held in one hand. It looks like one of those keys normally used for classrooms at school.

“Application? What are you talking about?”

“Fufufu, you’ll understand once you take a look inside. Now, go on.”

After casually approaching the door, Master unlocks and opens it.

Cold air leaks out from the gap.

Peeking in, it appears to be a somewhat dim room covered by curtains. Four tables are lined up inside with four chairs accompanying them. And there are four monitors lined up as well, along with four full-sized desktops.

The room's like a really, really small Internet cafe. A space where people like me will totally feel at home.

“Erm, this is...”

“It's, like, a room someone dreamed up?”

Segawa let out a small breath.

“Ah, computers!”

Ako went towards the computers.

And the club president whirled about towards us and spread her hands apart.

“Welcome to the Modern Communications-Electronics Recreation Club—hmm, that takes some time to say. Welcome to the *Netoge* Club... no, the Online Games Club? Well, it is of no consequence. At any rate, I am your club president, Goshouin Kyou. Dear members, let us make this club a lively one, hand-in-hand, from now on.”

“The *Netoge* Club, huh...”

“An Online Games Club, she says...”

She's serious about this, totally serious.

Showing no concern for the dazed Segawa and myself, Master —no, the club president—continues.



“The club activities comprise mainly online games and offline meetings during rest days. We cannot pay for cash items through the club budget, unfortunately, so I must request you afford them out of your own pocket. However, we are fully furnished with air-conditioning and the connections are based on the school’s. There will be no issue with the environment itself.”

“No, hold on, wait, isn’t this just weird?”

Finally snapping out of sleep mode, Segawa grabs Master’s shoulders.

Yep, it’s weird. Definitely weird.

“What do you mean?”

“What do I mean, you say?”

Both Segawa and I surrounded Master and her nonchalant words.

“How did you make a club? Why are these computers already prepared despite you deciding this at lunch? Why are we suddenly club members? Geez, I mean, everything, everything! There’s nothing I can’t poke at here! Hey, Ako, you say something too!”

After passing the conversation to Ako who was walking round and round the computers, she turns back towards us and shows a broad smile.

“Yes? I am impressed at how magnificent it ended up, but there is nothing strange about this, is there?”

“I blame myself for even putting any hope on you!”

“How horriblee?!”

The shock Ako received was apparent, but let's leave her aside for now.

The problem at hand is what to do about this well-equipped room.

“Anyway, what you mean—is that we should make a Netoge Club and play online games together?”

“Precisely. I was somewhat unreasonable, but I had these rather decent computers brought in. The room's usage is assured, naturally, and I have already received permission for us to connect to the network. We can play online games in this room after lessons starting from today!”

“So we can all play here together anytime from today!”

Ako simply celebrated.

No, this isn't something to just accept with a smile, is it? Just how many people did you have to trouble to set this up?

“Fu-fu-fu, anyone and everyone can enjoy online games without any hesitation here. What do you think of that, is this not simply magnificent?”

Master's chest swells with the pride from her own achievements.

“Wow, amazing. I'll be taking my leave and heading back home, then.”

And Segawa decides straight away to return home.

That's not fair, you're totally leaving me to deal with the fallout alone.

"Wait, Schwein, the best has yet to come. Why would you leave?!"

"Don't call me Schwein! ...Listen here, unlike you, I'm perfectly fine with having online games as nothing more than a hobby."

Crossing her arms before her chest, she speaks in a horribly arrogant manner towards a senior.

It appears Master had decided to observe Segawa's offensive for the moment.

"I would never think about playing online games even at school. It's not like I can just go up to a friend and say, 'I'm in the Netoge Club' either. How about you just join it on your own if you want it that bad?"

"I do believe those words do not belong with one who would say lines like how making a boyfriend is unnecessary as it would result in less time to spend logged in, however?"

"Ugyk."

Oh, that's one odd noise you let out, Segawa.

Might be just me, but I thought I saw that old, familiar critical hit effect there.

"T-That's only an issue of priorities. Online games are more important than some boyfriend, but that said, it's nothing to sacrifice my school life over."

“I wonder, how many m’s could we earn a day if we merely played for another two hours?”

“Ughh.”

Yet another direct hit shaves away at Segawa’s life bar.

“Like I said, I’m a normal female high schooler at school and...”

“I suppose we will lose the opportunity to play with you, Schwein, as the gap between our levels and hunting areas steadily grow. Oh dear, what an utter shame.”

“Ugh, no matter what you say, I’ll—”

“Hey, hey, Rusian, which is the switch for these?”

“Aah, this one?”

Ignoring that series of offenses and defenses, Ako’s trying to switch the computers on without asking for further permission.

The familiar start-up sequence initiates upon a button press from Ako. Woah, now that I take a closer look, these monitors are huge.

“Hey, Rusian, I can install LA, can’t I?”

“I wouldn’t know even if you ask me... but does it have the specs for that in the first place?”

Can the school’s computer handle online games?

I tap away commands and confirm the computer’s specifications.

Now then, let’s take a look at what’s in this frame with this dialog window.

“Let’s see, the CPU’s a nice i7, huh? Ooh, amazing, the OS’s on a SSD. And the memory’s... 16GB? The graphic card’s SLI’ed GTXs?! What’s with this?!”

The specs are higher than expected; just how much did this cost?!

Another shocked voice covered my astonished words.

“S-Seriously?!”

Segawa, who was looking at Master, swung her face this way.

“Seriously, look. What’s with this computer? It’s like it has nothing on its head aside from wanting to play online games!”

“Hahaha, I said I brought in rather decent ones, did I not?”

It’s too decent! It’s practically custom-built, isn’t it?!

“Wow, it’s like it’s way faster than my computer too!”

“Well, yeah...”

“SSD, SLI’ed graphic cards... 16GB memory...”

Segawa sends glances at Ako, happily fiddling with the computer, while trembling as though losing her cool.

This is bad; Master’s abnormal status afflicting attack landed a critical hit on Segawa. I can practically see a heavy damage over time on Segawa’s life bar.

Her life’s probably going to fall ever lower if this keeps up.

“Come to think of it, Schwein, were your computer’s specifications not rather questionable?”

“Ugh... they are, it’s a hand-me-down. If it’s with this computer, even I can pull them in, can’t I?”

Segawa’s frame sways from side to side.

She takes a step towards the computers, pulls that foot back, and steps forward yet again.

And all without taking her sight off the actual computer for even a second.

“There’s a station prepared for each of us, you may use one all you like, Schwein.”

“Ggh... this is an attractive offer... but this isn’t... but a SSD...”

“Dirty, you really do play dirty, Master. This is too unfair!”

You sure sound happy, Ako.

Master v.s. Schw. It seems the match’s decided.

“Throw in the towel, Schwein, our fight is over.”

Segawa falls to her knees before Master, grinning away.

“I-I get it already, I just have to join, don’t I?! In exchange, I’ll be doing whatever I like with this baby, okay!”

“Good girl. Leaving Ako aside, you do not mind either, do you, Rusian? It appears this marks the safe creation of the Modern Communications-Electronics Recreation Club, huh?”

Looks like nothing I can do will put a dent in things by this point.

I don’t really care as long as I don’t get lumped with some needless responsibility by Master in the end, anyway.

“Sure, I don’t mind, but Master, what did you make all of these for?”

“What are you saying, Rusian? It’s obviously for Ako and you.”

“Us?”

“Yes?”

I mean, I am happy about getting to play games at school too, but did I ask her for anything this absurd?

Looking at us tilting our heads in turn, Master approached one of the computers.

“You said it, didn’t you? —That Ako needs to understand the differences between games and real life. Have you forgotten?”

“Sure, I said that, but...”

I have no idea how that led to this.

“Listen, playing online games here means to game while exposing your face to everyone. Your expressions, your mannerisms while operating your character are completely exposed. You can even convey what you will have normally done via chat through voice instead too.”

Master pats the monitor starting to light up.

“The game character and the one controlling it will be present at the same time. Does that not seem like the best conditions for Ako to experience the differences between games and real life?”

“Aah, that’s true!”

Conversations in *chat* and actual conversations are completely different.

We'll probably be incapable of our usual mushy routine and Ako'll probably notice how I'm completely different from Rusian, won't she?

"That's right, it really does. If we play here for a little while, even Ako may settle her misunderstandings."

"Nn... I don't think anything will change, though?"

That's what you think now.

"Just watch, Ako, I'll shatter those illusions you dreamed up into tiny pieces and show you just how pathetic I am!"

"Yeah, that line alone would have ended down a romance spanning a hundred years."

"No, I'll have you witness how that's nothing compared to my love!"

".....Haa."

Segawa gave a strained laugh while I stared off with Ako.

And that was how the first club activity of the Modern Communications-Electronics Recreation Club began.

"Well then, it should be about time for us to begin. There is still time until school ends and we should be able to fit in a hunt or two."

"Then I'll be taking this one!"

Perhaps recovering from earlier, Segawa powers up a computer with enthusiasm.

I sit down as well at the remaining station.

Power it on and... woah, it starts up fast.

“Master, can I set the wallpaper to something cute?”

“Feel free to tinker with it to your heart’s content. Set it to suit yourself. ...Aah, it would be for the best if you do not connect to any improper sites, Rusian. It would be a bother if it causes any trouble at the staff room.”

“Don’t direct that to me alone!”

I won’t look at anything like that in front of others! Who do you think I am?!

“Woah, gross.”

“Don’t use that usual tone for this! ...Besides, you better not install any fishy tools, too, you’ll get us involved in an IP ban as well.”

“I won’t install anything like that! What kind of idiot do you take me for?!”

Schw got mad, but just so you know, I remember those misdeeds you committed.

“You may say so, Schwein, but there was once when you installed an auto-potion tool and could not stop your use of potions, if I recall correctly.”

“Uh.”

Yep, there was that. Trying out a prohibited external tool out of curiosity, Schw completely panicked as the *poof* effect on using potions continued incessantly.

“Come to think of it, I believe there was that ‘I am a bot’ incident too...”

“Stop itttt, don’t bring up my dark history!”

After installing the client while talking on and on, I start up the game.

A small window to enter my ID and password shows up along with the far-too-familiar BGM.

It’s sort of calming how the login window remains the same even when logging in from elsewhere.

“Huh? Rusian, how did you set it to full screen again?”

“Press the Enter key while holding down the Alt key... huh, Ako, you play it full screened?”

“Is it strange?”

Sitting snuggly at the desk beside me, Ako curiously looked up at me.

Full screened refers to showing absolutely no windows aside from the game’s on the monitor. To put it in another way, it’s a mode where you can’t do anything but play.

“I mean, if you’re full screened, you can’t look at wikis or anything, right? And besides, you’ll get minimized whenever you get some notification or message and stop moving too.”

“Yes, I always do, though?”

“What are you, a newbie?”

No, sure, I guess you are one despite playing for over a year, Ako!

Damn, so that's why she stops moving at strange times, leading to my deaths, I get it now.

“...Eh, what are you saying? Isn’t playing it on full screen normal?”

There’s a newbie here too!

“You, too, Schw?! You’re supposed to be DPS too!”

“B-But they say full screen is lighter on the computer! I’m only taking extra caution because the specs are bad, what’s so bad about it?!”

Aah, so that’s it.

Come to think of it, full screen really is a little lighter on the computer. There are times to set it that way when under-specced.

“I see now, sorry about that, please don’t get angry.”

“Hmph.”

Pressing down on the keys, sullen, Schw set LA as full screened as well.

Guess I should hold off on pointing out this computer is unquestionably capable of window mode.

“But still, there’re times when you have to confirm some information while playing, right? What do you do, then?”

I ask the question that popped into my mind.

I wonder what happens if you can’t show the information on the side?

I asked without any real concern, but Segawa blushes slightly and averts her eyes from mine before speaking.

“...That’s, well, on a nearby memo pad.”

“You’re noting down walkthroughs for online games by hand?!”

“Shut up already! Who cares about what I do!”

Schw slams on the table.

True, it is rather amusing imagining how Schw would be glancing at a memo pad while moving the mouse around with her small hand while playing.

“By the way, Master, what about you?”

“I normally run on full screen too. ...With three monitors, though.”

“The rich should just go and shuddap.””

Ako and I managed to perfectly line up our words.

“Now then, have everyone logged in without problem?”

“Yees. Ah, it’s Rusian. Good afternoon, Rusian... there.”

□ Ako: Good afternoon, Rusian.

A line of chat from Ako shows up on my screen after she says so.

What meaning was there in doing that?

“I’m right beside there, you don’t have to type it out in the chat.”

“Ah, you’re right.”

Also, your typing’s really slow. You peck one key at a time while looking at the keyboard?

It’s because of that and your love for chatting that the party’s always in danger.

“So, what do we do? Hunt or something?”

Schw’s character shrugs his shoulders along with her words.

A glance shows the person inside shrugging her shoulders too.

Oh my, what a honest fellow we have here, too.

“Certainly, our coordination should be perfectly with this. Let us continue from yesterday and hunt at Great Bluenk Volcano. We will surely be more effective than usual.”

“Grinding even after all four of us are gathered here... well, I’m okay with it, though.”

“Very well, let us—”

“No, wait for a moment.”

I interrupted Master’s words.

There’s one thing that had always bothered me for a long time. I want to take this opportunity today to confirm it.

“Ako, lemme see your equips for a bit?”

“Yes? Go ahead?”

I peek into Ako’s screen as she sits beside.

Taking care to not be conscious of how it’s like I’m leaning into Ako, I check her equipment.

“O-Oh...”

A surprised exclamation escapes from me.

S-She's terrible...

I felt light-headed for a moment. No good, this isn't good at all.

“...Ako, we said we're heading for the great volcano now, so why are your equipment water-resistant?”

“I make sure to wear this dress since I'd received it from Rusian.”

*Kyaa*; Ako hides her face with both hands.

“Don't just go *kyaa* here! I passed that to you when we were going hunting at the sea, didn't I?! Just go and wear your fire-resistant stuff!”

“Eeh, but the Flames Robe isn't cute, you know?”

“Hey, you know, that's not what we mean here... wait, woah. What is this supposed to be?”

Peeking into Ako's screen as well, Schw spoke in an exasperated tone.

“There are all these weird enchantments on this rod, but just what is it? I've never heard of this, what is this Pink Star *Kira-kira* Rod?”

“Shiny stars pop out when you hit an enemy with it. It's totally adorable!”

Ako speaks with the full intent of bragging, but Schw only roars at her with a complicated expression comprising both surprise and understanding.

“I’d always thought there were these ‘*kira* ☆’ things every now and then during battle, but it was all due to you, huh?!”

“Hmp-hahahahahaha!”

“Why are you laughing, Master?!”

Aah, what sort of a ridiculous land mine have we been building up?

“Eh... could it be that my equipment are weak?”

Did you really just realize? Ako peeks at me in a fluster. Do we even have to point that out?

“You could call it weak? Or soft? Or rather, you’re looking down on the game. Hold for a bit, I have an Affection Rod for healing in my storage, so I’ll lend it to you.”

“But I have that?”

“Then use it!”

With the equipment Ako personally called, “uncute”, pushed onto her, we finally made our way to the map for Great Bluenk Volcano. I feel hot just looking at the insides of this volcano. Monsters rather strong against the fire element swarm across the map, but they pose no real danger to the four of us.

Passing through the entrance gate, we line up at the entrance to the hunting spot for four and head for the cave’s depths covered in flames.

“Well then, let’s set somewhere that looks good as our base for now. Ako, buffs please.”

““kaay.”

Ako gingerly taps her keyboard and uses her skill on Schw after that request for strengthening magic for allies.

*Jwaan!* A sound echoed out loudly from everyone’s speakers.

“The sound’s coming from everyone, huh?”

“Yeah, we’re together, after all.”

“Ooh... so if I do this...”

*Jwaanjwaanjwaanjwaanjwaan.*

“Aaaahh, shut up! Or rather, you’re making it lag! How long are you going to go ‘jwaanjwaan’ for?!”

“Ehehe, I’m sorry.”

“The enemy’s coming while you’re fooling around!”

“Very well, watch on as my flames burst from my *umaibou* here!”

Master begins the chant for magic with a flourish.

Both Schw and I shouted out at that moment.

“You’re banned from using cash items, Master!”

“W-What?! I will have nothing to use otherwise!”

“Huh? Let me take a look—woah, why do cash items make up half of your inventory?!”

“Are cash items not stronger? What need is there for anything but them?”

Her expression tells us she has no idea what we felt so strange.

Aah, it's people like these who allow online games to prosper; that mysterious, strong emotion runs through me.

“Wait, Rusian, do something about her!”

“I don't lose anything from others using their cash.”

“You're the worst!”

I'm kidding, just kidding.

“Right, Master, you're prohibited from using cash items while we're here.”

“What tyranny! Do you not recall that I am your guild master, your club president, and your student president?!”

“That's enough, just shut up.”

We head deeper into the volcano while defeating the enemies on the way.

It wasn't exactly tough as the enemies didn't come as one, but I'm hardly used to the controls on this machine.

“Nn, using this sure is annoying.”

“Rusian, you find it difficult using a different computer from your usual?”

“That's not it.”

I tap on the mouse.

The problem isn't with the computer itself but the external peripherals.

“I usually set it to move with a click and play with one hand, using a mouse with side buttons, you see. So it’s annoying using my left hand.”

“You always play using one hand? What sort of mouse do you use?”

“It’s just a normal twelve buttons mouse.”

It’s not hard finding one on the market. It’s nothing rare.

Still, Schw scowled at me with a squint as though looking at some abnormal animal.

“...Do you have a screw loose somewhere?”

“Now that’s rude.”

I mean, using just one hand is more relaxing and if it’s possible to move by clicking, that’s what it would end up as.

“That reminds me, speaking of unique mice, I brought an interesting article along. Standby for a little there.”

After saying so, Master left her seat and scrounged through the shelves in the back.

She may have brought various things in already as I can see multiple boxes and tools on the selves.

And she takes out a large, oval keyboard from there along with a mouse that resembles a flight stick.

“Behold, this keyboard and mouse are from the very apex of cutting-edge ergonomics!”

“Are they really grounded in ergonomics? Their shapes are really out there.”

“The one who thought up of these must have lived in the future. They’re truly lovely!”

Ako appears to feel something for them as she agrees.

Aah, she’s definitely the type to like weird things like this. She’s my bride, after all.

“So, they’re shaped oddly, but are they really all that easy to use?”

“They are difficult to use. To a terrifying extent, even.”

Master replied instantly without even a trace of hesitation.

“...Just toss them away.”

“I want to try them!”

“Ako, try saying that after you learn how to use a normal keyboard!”

We arrive at the deepest area as we continued on.

“I feel like I’m seriously exhausted just getting this far.”

“But Ako’s healing is better, stats-wise, so it’s more relaxing than usual, huh?”

“But it’s not cute... Rusian, are you fine with that?”

What is she saying?

I won’t say that appearance, cuteness, is completely unnecessary, but beauty lies with the strength of equipment when it comes to hunting.

That’s the prim and proper dress code, so to speak.

“I guess I’ll say this just in case, but I’m more thankful for your ability to protect me than how cute you look.”

“Ah... I guess, so.”

After saying so with a wry smile, Ako’s eyes flashed open as though realizing something.

“That’s true, no matter how cute they are, there’s no meaning to it if you die, Rusian. Yes, I’ll do my best for you, Rusian!”

“...Aah, yeah.”

I’m the one troubled if you’re to say that with such a genuine expression.

“Then, I’ll randomly go get some enemies, so I’ll be counting on you if they spawn here.”

“Leave it to me.”

After watching Master firmly nodding with a composed expression, I immediately turn to the remaining pair.

“Counting on you, Schw, Ako.”

“Yes, I’ll use what little power I have to its fullest!”

“I’ll put in my all to ensure she doesn’t add in any funds.”

“Is this money not mine to spend?! Why would you?!”

Leaving the trio, I gather up the enemies about.

Taking care to get hit as little as possible, I race back to the base.

“Everyoneee, I’ll be back in around ten seconds!”

It's really relaxing, not having to type that into the chat while moving. I make Rusian run on, avoiding the attacks with ease.

“You can count on me, I’ll wipe them out with area-of-effect magic—what is it, Schwein? Why do you hold my arm down?!”

“That! You were! Trying to use a cash item! Weren’t you?!”

“Do magicians not live solely to flaunt their grand magicks?!”

“Then why would you buy firepower with money?!”

The fight outside the actual ring’s getting worse, but is this really alright?

“I’m reaching, you ready?”

“Khh, very well... come as you like!”

“Okay, come at me!”

The pair took up their positions at the last moment.

Alright, they’ll make it.

“Threee, twoo, oneee, now!”

Ice magic rained down immediately after my character dove into our base.

“Taste my perfect blizzard! Hahaha, what perfect timing!”

“It’s so perfect that they’re all going for you, Master!”

“That’s too much freedom from you!”

Hit by powerful magic before they decided on their target, the monsters immediately switched target to the magician Master controlled.

With her cashless magic unable to mow them down in a single hit, all of the enemies swarm onto her.

“How does the usual me and the current me differ... it is but a matter of pride and cash...”

“Perfect blizzard, Master is dead.”

Ako lowers her eyes and offers a silent prayer.

“No, seriously, Master’ll die, wait, really... she really died!”

Master melted soon enough, surrounded by a crowd of enemies.

Yeah, that would happen. I knew it; I knew it from when her magic activated.

“What will you do about this! Ako, revive, resurrect me!”

“Erm... Rusian, which icon was Revive?”

“When this battle ends, I’m getting married with Schw!”

“Why are you giving up already?!”

“But you’re already married to me! What are you saying?!”

“Ako, get to the wall, the wall!”

That said, Master’s magic had landed a good hit on them. Though it brought us to the verge of death, we somehow managed to annihilate them.

“I’m just exhausted all of a sudden...”

Master crosses her arms as she triumphantly talks to Schw, moaning with her hand practically leaving her mouse.

“That is the result of rejecting microtransactions. This is what happens when you are frugal with your microtransactions. Hear me, microtransactions are akin to offering alms to the management. It is only natural for divine punishment to descend if you are idle with those offerings to the management, our god; it is but divine providence.”

“Stop trying to fit it as some sort of religion!”

An “orz” speech bubble shot out from Schw’s in-game character. She seemed as though she would go on and fall onto the ground in real life, too, if I let her be. —Not that I disagree with her.

“Schw-chan, you’re always using that, but how is it read?”

Ako curiously asks.

“*orz*... isn’t it *o-ar-zee*?”

“I read it as the words, ‘slump over’, though?”

“It’s *ooz*, *ooz*, I won’t accept anything else. ...Well, then, I’ll take my leave for a little, so go on ahead.”

“The toilet?”

“Don’t you dare ask.”

Waving her hand, Schw left the room.

True, the room’s cold for the computers, so the urge will probably come quicker.

With Schw gone, the only ones left were the three of us.

“...Right, now’s the time.”

I grinned as I spoke. I've been looking for this opportunity since we set out on the hunt.

Controlling my character a bit, I then walk over to Schw's desk.

"Rusian? What is the matter?"

"You see, Ako, if you do this here..."

I fiddle with Schw's mouse.

"Oh-hoh. There is this handy item I own if you intend on doing that."

Master, who peeked in from the side, fiddles with it too.

"Ooh, looking good there."

"It's adorable!"

Clickity, clickity, click—

"I'm back... Ako, am I still alive?"

"You're perfectly healthy!"

She calls out with an expression pretending she knows nothing when Schw enters the room.

"I'll be back with enemies straight away, get ready!"

"Yeah, yeah, I get it. Geez, can't you give me a break for... once?"

Schw comes to a stop after sitting on her chair and facing the monitor.

Kh, ku-ku-ku, just as expected.

That's exactly the dumbfounded look I wanted to see!

“Wait... huh? Eh, what?”

“Schw, I’m heading your way!”

“Heading my way, what?! What’s this?! Why am I wearing a bear costume and holding a spring onion?!”

Yes, Schw’s character is brilliantly disregarding the dress code for hunting, equipped with a bear costume good for nothing more than its looks and cuteness as well as a spring onion sword, a joke item from an event.

It goes without saying that I had done along that with Master.

“C’mon, treat this seriously, we’re in the midst of battle.”

“Practicality over cuteness, Schw-chan!”

“You’re the last person I want to hear that from, Ako! How dare you all just go and change my—hey, the enemies are already here!”

Just as I jump onto our base.

I had regulated their numbers to prevent any casualties this time round, but that said, they aren’t anything insignificant.

“C’mon, c’mon, Schw, stop wasting your breath and fight!”

“Aah, geez, I get it already! Don’t blame me no matter what happens! Wait, woah, this spring onion’s packing some firepower!”

“Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha, it is at its enchant limit thanks to me, after all!”

As the one who’d prepared the spring onion, Master laughs out loud.

Ooh, she's serious. It's really ripping through the enemies. That's one ridiculous spring onion.

"Master, how do you spend your money?! Aah, my Schwein-chan's..."

A bear costume slicing up enemies as it swings about a spring onion.

A horribly surreal sight.

"What have you done!"

"It's just a bit of a joke, don't get mad! Don't... woah?!"

It was after that, that the person behind the character came slicing me up.

It was only too bad that this, on the other hand, was not *surreal* but simply *violent*.

The bell announcing the end of club activities chimed as we returned to town with a hunt finished.

"Aah, that was way more tiring than our usual hunting..."

Taking her hands off the mouse and keyboard, Schw shakes her hands as she speaks.

"Our efficiency had improved over our usual, had it not?"

"That's just because Rusian took over Ako's controls half the time after a while, isn't it?"

"You are really good, Rusian."

"And you should be practicing more."

Schw stretches herself with a groan.

We're at our usual haunt in town, the cafe.

As always, Ako snuggles up to my character's side and a whisper chat opens up with a *pikon*.

□ Ako: Good work, Rusian.

“Like I said, you don't have to do that, Ako.”

Nothing would change from usual with that. I need her to talk to me, beside her, instead of Rusian, my character in the game.

“Ah, that's right. Then...”

Nodding, Ako's face scoots to my ears.

“Wha, hey, Ako...”

“...Good work, Rusian.”

“~~~!”

A warm breath tickles my ears as she “whispers” into my ears.

Ako remains in that posture as my body stiffens up.

“Thank you for everything, I feel like I've been of more use to everyone than always.”

“R-Right, that's good to hear.”

“...But-you-see!”

Continuing on by gripping my arm, she holds it tight, practically pinching it.

“What did you mean by ‘When this battle ends, I'm getting married with Schw’!”

“No, that’s, well, just a joke.”

“Then you should have said it to me. Rusian, I hate you!”

After saying so, Ako darted away from me.

And she turns her face away in a huff. I can’t see the expression she has on.

“Ah, no, I’m sorr...”

Flustered, I struggle for an excuse and Ako speaks as though to interrupt my words.

“—I lied. I love you.”

“Ah... Ako...”

Turning back towards me, Ako speaks while acting like a sulking cat.

My body grew warmer, bit by bit, just looking at her.

Despite it being barely any different from our usual *chat*, doing so in real life like this... not good, I’m getting swept into her pace. But really, I’m starting to wonder what’s wrong with that?

Ako’s expression switches rapidly and she looks up at me as I struggle against those thoughts.

“H-How was that? Have you fallen in love with me? No, have you fallen in love with me again?”

“.....That part, you didn’t have to add. I might have fallen otherwise.”

“N-No way... what have I done?”

“No redo’s. Geez...”

Damn, and I would have fallen with just a little—no, wait, that’s not it. That was dangerous, I’m glad I managed to hold up. Yep.

“Hey, Nishimura... do you understand our goal here?”

Segawa looked towards me with disgusted eyes as our conversation continued.

Erm, our goal... aah, that’s right! We were supposed to have Ako stop it with that husband thing!

“Ah, right, come to think of it, that’s right, hahaha...”

“This is no time to laugh! We’re doing this for you!”

Schw bangs on the table. No, really, my bad.

“And the goal of the Modern Communications-Electronics Recreation Club has yet to be accomplished, huh? It appears there exists a necessity for club activities tomorrow as well.”

“Eeh, we’re keeping this up?”

“We can stop if you want to, you know?”

Ako smiled and spoke as she pointed at the computers.

The temptation must be tough for her with the low specs on her computer back home. In fact, Schw stared at the monitor before her with a bitter look before letting out a breath, seemingly defeated.

“...Well, fine. I’m not against it or anything.”

Segawa spoke with her head hung down.

“That was really fun, wasn’t it?”

“...I have to agree.”

I nod as well to Ako’s sincere laugh.

Though it wasn’t our goal, yeah. It was seriously fun.

“I have to admit it was fun, but...”

Segawa speaks softly as her sight slowly sweep across us and she takes in a breath.

“It feels like the boundaries between real life and the game are fading away, you know...?”

“Did you say something, Schwein?”

Segawa shook her head when Master spoke so out of the blue with a smile.

“Not really. Anyway, that’s enough, right? I’m going home.”

Segawa quickly switches the computer off and leaves her seat with her bag.

She heads for the door without turning back, just like that.

“Ah, hey, you’re going back all alone?”

“Why do I have to go back with you?”

“...True, that.”

Schw would be a different case, but Segawa would never head home together with me, huh? That certainly is obvious.

I call out to Master, seeing Segawa off from the room.

“What about you, Master? Heading back now?”

“I still have some business to attend to in school. The two of you can feel free to leave first.”

Master speaks in a cool yet cheerful manner.

Two of us, huh?

You meant to emphasize that “two of us”, didn’t you?

“Then, erm.”

“Yes, let’s go, Rusian.”

“...Yeah.”

I didn’t say anything about us catching up with Segawa on the way back.

I could only see Segawa snapping after getting called Schw-chan over and over again as we returned if we did.

“Today was really fun, wasn’t it, Rusian? I’m really looking forward to tomorrow.”

“Well, I guess.”

Ako squints at the setting sun ahead of our school route, somewhat fatigued, as she let some words out.

“It is a little tiring, coming to school multiple days in a row for the first time in a while...”

“How do you live, normally...?”

“Erm, I’ll be counting on you to support me in the end, Rusian, so I figured it would be alright.”

“Hey, hold up there.”

How are you planning for your future? I have no intention of approving that.

“Eh, could it be that you prefer a dual income family, Rusian?”

That’s not the problem here.

Still, well—if I am to choose from either.

“That’s right, dual income’s better.”

“Eh? What’d you say?”

Ako immediately asks back.

“...Like I said, dual income’s better.”

“Eh? What’d you say?”

Ako immediately asks back.

“Dual income’s—”

“Eh? What’d you s-”

Ako asks back, pretty much interrupting me now.

“Hey, you!”

“Kyaa!”

I chase after Ako who flees down the school’s street while laughing.

But with Ako’s slight physique, I caught her after what could hardly be termed a chase.

“Reflect on your deeds, scoundrel!”

“I am very sorrrry!”

“Geez...”

After I rub Ako's head, having easily captured her, she happily narrows her eyes and smiles.

I look towards her as I ponder just a little.

Does she really not come to school much?

“.....”

“Rusian? What is it?”

“Aah, it's nothing. Was thinking about how I'm getting used to being called Rusian in public.”

“I-I'm sorry, Nishimura-kun.”

Ako corrected herself after all that time.

There is a fair number of students nearby leaving school after their club activities and I feel glances from them. Still, seeing how I'm playing it off with just a “sure is embarrassing, huh”, it seems I've developed some resistance towards it.

Not that I need it; that resistance isn't helping.

“Erm, Nishimura-kun.”

“Hmm?”

Ako tugs at my sleeve after walking forward, slightly dispirited.

“When we walk like this, do we look like we're friends too?”

“Well, of course we do.”

We are, in fact, friends, after all.

“Then do we look like lovers?”

“I can't quite say.”

While we are walking together, that's all to it.

"Then do we look like those normalfags winning at life, you think?"

"I would definitely hope for my death if I were to see us nearby."

That's the truth.

Walking with a girl this cute pulling on his sleeve. That's definitely worthy of an execution by explosion.

"Fufufu... eat your hearts out, normalfags!"

"Calm down, calm down."

We walk down the route as I chide Ako, showing a sinister smile.

The night's coming ever closer with the sun sinking.

The neighborhood begins changing from a vivid orange to a dense black.

"At any rate, we are heading home pretty late, but would it be any problem for you? Did you contact your parents?"

I ask Ako and she replies, looking forward instead of towards me.

"I'll be okay. Neither of my parents are home much."

"...I see."

"I won't be able to play every night otherwise. No, mind you, I do switch off and greet them when they get back."

After saying so, Ako turns her eyes towards me and smiles.

I play even with my family back home, though—let's leave that aside.

Ako's voice sounded somewhat stiff when she mentioned her parents weren't home. Those words she spoke without looking at me. Was that a sore point?

Heck, she said she didn't have any friends, didn't come to school much, and her parents weren't home much either.

“...Nn.”

“Nishimura-kun?”

“No, it's nothing. ...Let's get a meat bun at the convenience store before going back, I'll let you have half.”

“What's with that, it's just like something those socially apt normalfags would do!”

“I know, right?”

Pushing on Ako's back as her eyes shines, we slowly walk on.

I tried my best to evict the part of myself indulging in the thought of helping out this girl in a sense different from that in-game.

## **“Master of Modern Communications-Electronics Recreation Club”**

From “Master of Epic”. It’s really long, when written, compared to its *kanji* equivalent.

Maybe I should use its acronym instead? ([more info](#))

## **“Please stop it! You intend to say something horrible to me now, right? Just like in a doujin!”**

Lighter variant of a particular meme. ([more info](#))

## **“Rusian, you scumbag!”**

Localized from 「まさに外道です」, the gedou baby meme.

I tried linking it to Scumbag Steve which is somewhat similar, but I suppose no one would get that. ([more info](#))

## **“Modern Communications-Electronics Recreation Club”**

Localized from 「現代通信電子遊戲部」.

「遊戲」, in particular, is a somewhat traditional word for “game”, but English seems to lack a word with such nuance.

Thanks for the suggestion, Solitary Recluse.

## **“Netoge”**

Hopefully obvious enough, but it’s “Internet Game”.

Would “Netgame” work better? I personally just like how *netoge* sounds.

## **“How does the usual me and the current me differ... it is but a matter of pride and cash...”**

An application of the somewhat obscure 「慢心、環境の違い」 meme. ([more info](#))

**“When this battle ends, I’m getting married with Schw”**  
Death flag.

## **Nekohime Hunter Frontier**

Translation of Netoge no Yome wa Onnanoko ja nai to Omotta?’s volume 1, chapter 3.

Translation and localization notes are available at the bottom, but try to finish the chapter before that.

The Modern Communications-Electronics Recreation Club continued its activities for several more days.

“Look, how’s my Rusian handling?!”

“Hey, you won’t hold if you bring along that many, you idiot!”

Controlled by Schw, Rusian approaches us while pulling in a crowd of enemies and gets engulfed by that entire cluster of enemies.

“Fufufufufu, I’m the best at using Master! Wait, aaah, I’m very sorry, I canceled the magic! Rusian’s dying!”

Rather than dying, Rusian’s dead, already dead! I was murdered mercilessly, gaining no more than a heap of death penalties!

“W-What’s this?! You’re so squishy! How am I supposed to use this?!”

“He’s not squishy, you’re just crap at using him! Aah, my experience points! Damn it, Schwein, you’re charging in too!”

“Don’t kill my Schwein! Master, hurry, heal!”

“What pleasure is there in using a character so lacking in power due to the absence of cash?”

“What, you’ve gotten some disease that kills you if you don’t cash?!”

Everyone’s fighting with characters different from those they originally use.

The challenge of the day’s a character exchange event under the pretext of liberating “Rusian” from a single person.

“Hey, doesn’t this count under sharing accounts?”

“No, no, really, we’re in front of each other’s computer for a bit, no one’s getting banned here!”

Yeah, probably!

On the next day, we went hunting for not experience points but rare items.

Our aim’s to tear the relationship between Ako and me apart by subjecting us to savage situations.

“Ah, it dropped! It dropped, it’s the Valentinus Armor!”

“Woaaah, it seriously dropped! I can’t believe it!”

The armor’s top-class with strong resistance and status bonuses along while increasing life significantly.

In addition, it’s a part of the Valentinus Set, a set of equipment, too. Anyway, equipping them all is just amazing or so I heard.

The item fetches a hundred m’s—a hundred million in-game credits—at the user market price.

Our aim was to go hunting for rare items and raging after failing to get any results, but raging even after it dropping is just as much an online games thing.

“Valentinus... Valentine... I don’t know why, but its name is really annoying. How about we toss it?”

“Cool down, Ako! Don’t throw away a hundred m’s piece of equipment for the vibes its name gives!”

“What shall we do with it? Put it up for sale and divide it, or will someone use it?”

“I want to use it!”

I immediately spoke.

Rusian will be even tougher with that!

“I want it too!”

“It goes without saying, but I, too, want it.”

“I’ll get it and toss it!”

Everyone raises their hands, pleading for its ownership, and then exchange glares.

We all stand up, our stares interlocking with what’s likely bloodthirst.

“If everyone wants it...”

“I suppose we have no choice about the matter.”

“No regrets!”

“Let’s do it!”

Rock, paper, scissors!

Or so we argue over where the rare item goes.

“Huh, it stopped?”

“Hmm, the *saba*‘s dead?”

On the next day, the *saba* died, rare as it is.

Written as *saba* and read as server. And the server dying essentially means that the server’s down and no one’s able to log in.

It’s an online game thing to have its servers die often during open beta and right after official service starts, but it turns rare after stabilizing. Now that I think about it, it has been quite a while since the last time LA’s servers went under.

“It’s still evening, so maybe the cleaning lady went and pulled the plug?”

Ako says while trying to log in, time and time again, and getting rejected each time.

“What an aggravating lady. This is a truly regrettable state of affairs.”

“Prepare the new ballistic missile made in Japan, Ikan-no-I No. 3!”

Where are you planning to aim that, hey, stop it, Ako.

Still, what should we do when we aren’t able to log in to LA—oh, right.

“This isn’t the LA club or anything, right? If we can’t get in, why don’t we find another online game?”

“Hmph, another online game, you say?”

Master seems somewhat willing to get onboard while Schw, on the other hand, frowns.

“Another online game now? Isn’t LA enough?”

“But we have nothing to do with the server dead, right? Any recommendations?”

I personally try searching myself while I speak. Hmm, nothing really stands out, huh?

“Oh, this looks good.”

And Master calls out to us while displaying its official website on her monitor.

“What are your thoughts on this online game? By some stroke of luck, its open beta begins this very evening, it’s a MMORPG developed overseas. The game it was based off is rather famous and the management is that company renowned for their flimsy servers. Now, how about it? This has all the makings of bloodthirsty login game for us to relish.”

Master says with a smile full of anticipation.

Login game, as in desperately typing in one’s ID and password over and over again in order to be the first to log in to a game whose login servers exhibit behavior that would never happen normally due to the number of players logging in all at once exceeding their limit; that login game which attained great popularity among online gamers too far gone?

People must be flocking to this famous franchise this time round, not to mention how their servers are brittle. There’s no

limit to registrations and with the F2P open beta starting in the evening rather than the NEET timing of noon—so that's what she meant.

I take a look at Master smirking away and she returns a smile fitting someone who "understood".

"....."

".....(gulp)"

I glance towards Ako and see her exuberant as well.

That's my bride for you, she gets it.

"Huh? What login game? What's so fun about that? Let's just surf the 'net until LA revives."

Yet unfortunately, there's one outsider right here.

She knows nothing. Nothing about that one moment all online game player enjoys the most...!

Guilty, guilty, guilty... our voices overlap.

"Wait, eh, what? Just what is it?"

"Hah... you're against playing a login game? What are you, some complete amateur?"

"What could be more enjoyable than the login game for an open beta? Do you not even understand that much, Schwein? I feel ashamed as your club president."

"It's time for us to leave all login games in the dust!"

"No, no, no, no, you're all acting weird! Just what is it, what's this login game?!"

“Allow me to explain!”

Master’s index finger points straight up as Schw utterly panic.

“The login game—the *Lo Gu In* *ge-e-mu* refers to a torture method, ‘*ge-e-mu*’, practiced by the underground organization, ‘*Lo Gu In*’, from ancient China! They would release their enemies into the wilderness in the searing heat of a summer where **geothermal** energy would rob them of their lives. There, they would undergo **emaciation**, finding neither prey nor water no matter how hard they tried, dying miserably as an end to that horrifying **mutilation**. Many of its victims were labeled as ‘*Onrhein*’ from how they devoured even the clothing they wore and parts of their own bodies in their hunger. The extensive list of victims includes those such as *Ichiro Onrhein*, *Castle Onrhein*, and from the Western side, *Didooon Bon Onrhein*.”

“And in the modern era, the act of logging in before everyone else through desperate repetition regardless of the tremendous effort spent and futility of it all is termed login game... and that can be traced back to the *Lo Gu In*’s *ge-e-mu*.”

Or so Ako picks up after Master’s exposition.

“Lies! Those are totally lies, right?!”

“No, really, I read it once in a book too, you know?”

“Where’s that book from?! Come on, spit it out!”

“...Minmei Publishing, I think?”

“I knew you were lying!”

No, I wasn’t, how rude.

“Wait a minute, we’re doing this? Seriously? Despite how we’ll get sick of it after half a day?! We’re going to bother creating an account and spend effort logging in?! Even though we won’t get anything out of it?!”

“Download the client, posthaste! This is an order from your Master!”

The order of the day’s after-school period is to enjoy a login game the opinions from the reluctant Schw disregarded.

“Kh, to think I would suffer from an error at the server select despite penetrating the login... however, there is no necessity to return to the login screen after logging in. Come, let me witness how you shall deal with my rapid spamming!”

“Wait, Master, it looks like it helps if you restart the client after getting stuck at the server select.”

“Hmph, is that so? Very well, then I shall restart... h-hey, Rusian! It stops at the login now, I cannot even access the server select!”

“You fell for it! That’s what happens to the weak in a battle of information, Master! Now to take that opening and to run with it!”

“What deception! What deception, Rusian! Kh, with things at this stage, I can only retaliate by changing my password to a simple one for the time being!”

“It’s here, it’s here! I’ve finally passed the server select and gotten to the character creation! I’m at the top with a lead!”

“Stop it, press cancel, Ako!”

“You must not, you will end up regretting it if you create your character!”

“Character creation... the client stopped after I pressed it! It stopped responding! It all froze up along with the entire computer!”

“You had it coming to youuuuuu!”

“Welcome to the login spamming stage, Ako-kun!”

“Hey, just what is so fun about this...?”

“Whew, today sure was fun, huh, Master?”

“Indeed. So much so that it is a wonder why they do not sell it as a Simple 1200 game: ‘*THE Login*’.”

“Someone would make a time attack video and people would stick ‘A WEEK AFTER OPEN BETA STARTS’ tags on it.”

“The crowd cleared up two hours after it opened up this time, however. It is a slight minus how that was due to its mundane gameplay.”

“When it comes to online games, don’t just enjoy the logging in and ignore how boring the gameplay is...”

“I would have led at the top if I hadn’t froze there...”

Master and I were had our fill of fun, Segawa spoke while worn out, and Ako was apparently still unsatisfied.

I place my hand on Ako’s head and continued by patting it.

“There’s no need to get so down about it. It’s thanks to defeats like this that you can continue to enjoy login games in the future.”

“...Yes, I guess so.”

Ako looks up at me before her cheeks loosen as her eyes narrow.

Schw mutters while watching us.

“You know, isn’t this club... pointless?”

“Why’s that? Aren’t we having fun with these club activities every day?”

“We are, but that’s not what I mean. Wasn’t our original goal to pull Tamaki-san from her sleep-talk-ish claims to be Nishimura’s wife?”

“Yeah, that’s it. How are we supposed to respond to something that obvious?”

And what’s with that “original”? Isn’t that still our goal now?

Looking at me smiling away with doubt, Schw slowly reaches out with her hand.

“Like that?”

Her outstretched hand pointed at mine stroking Ako.

Erm... yeah, right.

“.....”

“...! ...!!”

Ako's head clings onto my hand and moves accordingly as I gently move it away.

She's so cute, just like a kitten wanting to be spoiled. How about I just bring her back home and raise her?

"How about you give up already?"

"It's all over if I give up!"

"It's not like not giving up will help any for that."

No, my battles will continue as long as I don't give up!

"Hey, wouldn't you give up?"

"Stop it, Ako, don't make me fall to that side!"

I desperately wave off Ako's seductive temptation as she pulls on my hand.

As a matter of fact, I have felt that our course of action has diverged somewhat.

It appears Ako still treats me as her husband whenever her focus strays even the slightest and we are only deepening the bonds between the four of us.

I'm still keeping my "Let's make Ako have a change of heart!" goal, but there's also a part of myself that continues thinking, "She's cute, so cute".

But still, even with that said, I don't want to become some e-flirt. My thoughts regarding the difference between games and real life haven't changed. We're only getting closer simply because, well, there's no harm treating Ako nicer since I got on good terms with her in real life too. That's how I feel, you see?

I make those excuses in my mind before I notice a complicated expression on Master.

“What’s the matter, Master?”

“No, I am somewhat troubled over the lack of progress. Much to my chagrin, the we will soon reach our time limit for these club activities.”

Master says something rather inexplicable.

“Time limit? What’s with that?”

“The time limit for this club to persist. Though I did pull some strings for its authorization, there is a certain aspect entirely out of my control.”

“To be specific?”

Master nods with a *hmm* before spreading her arms out at the clubroom and speaking.

“We have no adviser.”

“...Aah.”

Now that she pointed it out, I had never seen any teaching staff in this club.

Really, not even once.

“We will find an adviser before long... Though I did manage to have it established with that claim, the teachers are busy as well. It seems there are none capable of sparing our time for our netoge club.”

“Then, the time limit?”

“The time we have until our club is involuntarily disbanded due to the lack of an adviser. I believe it would be a week before the issue is raised at the staff meeting.”

One week left?!

That’s pretty short, considering how it has still been a week since we began club activities!

“No way, really?”

“That’s cutting it close.”

“Nothing can be done about it. To begin with, the club was forcibly pushed through to meet your hopes and expectations. In a sense, that compromise was accepted only because that time limit was present.”

Our hopes and expectations? Didn’t you arbitrarily decide on it, Master?

“Our...?”

Master turns a brilliant smile towards Ako who likely had the same doubts as me.

“I suppose you have a question to ask, Ako?”

“None whatsoever, Sir!”

Why are you going “Sir!”?

Still, I get it. I was thinking she was going too far and she really was, huh? She must have thought it didn’t really matter since it would be disbanded at the next staff meeting without an adviser anyway. And the responsibility would fall onto that teacher if we found one to advise us.

“At present, I am putting in effort in my search for an adviser, but I suppose it would be futile. Not many would want to be subjected to the treatment as the adviser for the netoge club in the staff room.

“Not much left to the imagination there, huh?”

Yeah, they’ll be on a bed of needles. Nothing could it make it harder to stay in the staff room.

Nn, still, our homeroom teacher’s new and slacking off, so she may be up for it, surprisingly enough.

The day’s club activities end as I decide to try asking a little.

“So I guess our club activities are coming to an end...”

“It’s a real pity, we have those powerful computers all to ourselves too.”

“That’s not what I meant, not one bit!”

I’m going back home along with Ako today like every day these days.

Ako who looks like she’s having fun walking by my side is, as expected, gathering gazes from the male students returning from their clubs and, on a side note, there are gazes focusing on me too—dark ones. After having gotten used to that and even getting a sense of superiority from it, it does feel a little sad to have it end in just a little more.

“It’ll be lonely with less time for the two of us! You could even say it’s like a husband leaving his wife behind for work despite them being newlyweds!”

“It’s spooky how realistic that sounds!”

And Ako’s sad in that particular sense as always.

“I do think it is okay if you, Rusian—no, Nishimura-kun, were to express your love more.”

Ako says it in a tone like conveying how a semi-rare refuses to drop despite the odds claiming otherwise.

Well, I get how she feels. I get that much, at least.

“Don’t expect men to turn all lovestruck. ...No, if I do say so myself, that might have already happened if you weren’t dealing with me.”

“That a fact?”

“That’s a fact.”

Letting out a sigh, I take my eyes off Ako.

Praying the evening sun’s dyeing the town crimson serves as a valid reason for my face colored in that same shade, I mutter my true thoughts.

“To be honest, Ako, you’re cute, we hit it off well, and it’s fun being with you. I do believe anyone aside from me, with my old trauma that had yet to disappear, would have given up and fall for you. On that note, I can’t help but feel a little bad for you, Ako”.

“E-Eeeh?!”

Ako’s eyes, widened, stared at me after I spoke.

“Nishimura-kun’s lovestruck! Could this be a dream?! I’ll be late for the club if I don’t wake up soon! Nishimura-kun, please pinch my cheeks a littl-owowowow!”

Her cheeks sure are soft, huh...

And to think I even bothered to say what I’m really thinking too.

Aah, some murder would be nice now. I want to murder myself for saying all those embarrassing things.

For some reason, Ako’s expression gradually soften up as I continue on tugging on her cheeks.

“Haah, Nishimura-kun’s... Rusian’s touching my face...”

“Why are you turning all happy?”

“Of course I am! I mean, Rusian, you’re acting all lovestruck and touching me on your own accord too!”

You’re the one who told me to do it.

What’s with her... After releasing her cheeks, Ako sways with her face falling towards me.

“Fuhehe, Rusian... aah, this strong flavor...”

“Eh, do my clothes smell?”

“That’s not it, you see, it’s like that, that... aah, geez! I can’t hold it back!”

“Hold what back?!”

Upon saying so with a glazed look, Ako dives face-first into my neck.

Grinding against me just like that, she takes in deep breaths, pretty much audible even to me.

“Rusian, sniff, sniff! Haa, haa! Sniffsniff!”

“Wh-wa-wait, stop it, stop it! It’s getting on me! I can totally feel you breathing on me!”

Just how hard is she inhaling?! Is she trying to suck me up?!

And with Ako’s head this close to my face, there’s this amazing smell too!

“Sniffing isn’t enough! What can I do but to taste it directly?!”

“Taste?!”

“Lick, lick! Rusian, lickity lick!”

“Wait-”

A moist sensation immediately runs over my nape.

That damp, soft something runs across my skin back and fro once or twice while my thoughts sank into a white blankness.

The rough breathing I sense on my skin climbs up towards my mouth as our breathing practically weave together.

It should have normally been an unpleasant sensation, giving me goose bumps, but it does feel good, just a little—wait, this is no time to let her get her way!

“W-Waaaaahh! Why are you licking me, you!”

Tearing off Ako with all the strength I can muster, I see the girl desperately reaching her hands out towards me as her red tongue peeks from her mouth.

“Aah! Just a bit more! Let me lick just a bit more!”

“We’re on the way from school!”

“I’m okay anywhere with you, Rusian! Anywhere’s fine with me, so let me lick you!”

“Stop attacking my reason directly! It’s never happening! My life points dropped to zero a long time ago!”

“Okaay.”

Perhaps having gotten her fill after going all out, Ako appears rather satisfied unlike me and my feeble breathing.

“Geez... I wonder why did you arrive at me, Ako? This would have never happened if it was any other guy. What caused it, some desire sensor?”

“P-Please don’t speak of something so frightening. Nishimura-kun would have never dropped for me if Desire Sensor-chan did its work properly.”

“Don’t say it like I’m some drop item!”

“You’re a super-rare, your grade’s so high that a single drop’s enough for a fortune!”

Rare? What rare? I’m just one of something stacked up mountain high from any of those shops.

No matter how I think about it, Ako’s the rare one here.

“Nah, you’re the super-rare here, seriously.”

“No way, you are, Nishimura-kun!”

It’s annoying how Ako flicks her face away as she says so.

What could have even made her say so?

“You’re the valuable one here, hey.”

“You’re wrong, you’ll fetch a higher price, Nishimura-kun!”

“Like I’m saying, you’re definitely worth more.”

“There’s nothing more precious than you to me, Nishimura-kun.”

“Well, there’s nothing more—wait, where is this going!”

That was close, I almost spoke out those good-for-nothing words while following the conversation’s flow!

Ako audibly clicked her tongue at how I had shut my mouth in a flutter.

“Khh, just a little more...”

“Nothing will change even with a verbal remark from me, you hear?!”

Just what’s with this?

Still, it’s true, it really will be a pity if we lose our club.

It will be sad losing the chance for these silly conversations with Ako in real life; I can’t deny that thought at all.

“Ah, Nishimura-kun, let’s go get a sweet red bean bun today, a sweet red bean bun!”

“My mouth’s in the mood for a meat bun, though?”

“Red bean bun!”

“Meat bun!”

“.....Rock, paper.”

“Scissors!”

I am in the mood for a meat bun, but well, a sweet red bean bun won’t be too bad either.

But of course, I won the bout.

“Is there nothing we can do...”

I mutter alone, the morning after, in the classroom before homeroom.

In the end, I spent the entire night thinking of how to stop the club from being abolished.

That’s no issue with me wanting that; it has nothing to do with us being married or anything, Ako’s my friend and it would make her depressed, that’s all to why I’m bothering to think of how I can be of help. Ako’s my friend and I do think it would be nice having a little more time to talk with her, that’s all to it.

That’s normal, normal, perfectly normal!

These excuses to myself are turning desperate. Unfortunately, I am aware of that fact.

To begin with, it’s not such a big problem at all, we simply need an advisor. All we have to do, is to capture some random teacher and ask him or her to please become the Modern Communications-Electronics Recreation Club’s advisor—nope, no one’s ever taking it up.

“Just what can we do...? Aah, just what can we do...?”

“Just what can we do, huh...”

A reply comes as though it's only natural after a monologue slipped out from me, my eyes shut.

I slowly open my eyes and there Ako is, meeting my gaze with a grin and her knees on the floor.

“Why are you here?”

“Naturally, to greet you for the morning, dear master.”

My classmates around, engrossed in their conversations, turn quiet for an instant. Before resuming. But it is obvious those glances are directed this way, just like the topics of their hushed voices.

The male gazes are practically hurting me for real; is this really alright? There won't be any physical, lasting damage on me, will there?

“Aah, Tamaki-san. That's in the game, it's different in real life. How about refraining from that already?”

I calmly try remonstrating her before my classmates.

“Eeh?”

“Don't you 'eeh' me.”

It's that unwillingness you're showing that's letting this misunderstanding continue on.

Heck, she's cute enough, just by putting on that unsatisfied face. Isn't this just unfair?

Right, let's try lecturing her from a different angle.

“Besides, that 'master' from earlier was more like a maid rather than a wife. That's not right, is it?”

“Hmm-hm, is that so? T-Then—”

Ako gulps down saliva before looking up towards me and speaks in a rare, bashful manner.

“It’s almost morning... my, dar, ling.♪”

A bewitching voice, a tender smile, and those gentle words.

That unquestionable affection in those eyes gazing upon me and that expression backing up them up with utter satisfaction.

If she was there when I woke up, I would have certainly passed that entire day in bliss.

“Oh, Ako, the bell rang. How about you get back already?”

“Eeehh?!”

And I fling those all into the distance with all I had.

“Everything! I put my everything into that earlier! That was really touching if I do say so myself! And you’re ignoring that here?!”

It appears even Ako was embarrassed after those words earlier as she speaks with a sincerely hurt tone.

Sure, that earlier had quite the impact, but you see, stuff like that’s a little stifling.

“Nn, your status points aren’t sufficient for those words just yet, Ako.”

“Khh, so I lack love! Can I up it as my level increases?”

“Life Offline assigns them automatically, so you can’t quite ensure that, can you?”

If you can pick the skills to improve, my life would never have ended up this way. Upon replying with that in mind, Ako's hands ball up into fists in anguish before quietly peeking at me.

“...Recruiting, 1 husband, love spec., please.”

“I apologize, but the wife slot’s full even if you look up at me with those eyes filled with hope.”

“N-No way...”

“Hey, the both... khh...”

Segawa clenches her fists with an expression showing just how much she wanted to interject from a delicate distance away.

It will be so much easier for her if only she let herself loose too.

“Everyone, please get to your seats quickly, the bell’s going to ring.”

And Saitou-sensei enters while saying so. As she steps towards the teaching platform, her feet suddenly come to a stop before my desk.

“My, Tamaki-san. It’s good to see you’re around today as well. Still, you should return to Class 1 soon, the bell will ring.”

“O-Okay. Then, Nishimura-kun, see you...”

“Yeah.”

Her voice turning into a whisper with the teacher before her, Ako leaves the classroom.

“...Nishimura-kun, are you on good terms with Tamaki-san?”

Saitou-sensei asks after seeing off Ako.

Putting all that about her being my wife aside, I do think of Ako as a good friend. It may be gone soon enough, but we are fellow club members too.

“Yes, we are.”

“I see. Then please get along with her. I’m sure Tamaki-san will appreciate that as well.”

She happily nods in satisfaction.

Erm, that seems exactly like how a teacher would react when a problematic child turns good, but just how is she, normally? It felt like a chill ran down my back.

Come to think of it, I was considering asking about the advisor thing, wasn’t I?

“That’s right, Saitou-sensei, won’t you be our club advisor?”

“Advisor?”

I try asking and she tilts her head, puzzled.

“Oh, Nishimura-kun, you were in a club?”

“The Modern Communications-Electronics Recreation Club.”

I reply so while feeling somewhat impressed that she actually bothered remembering her students’ clubs.

Saitou-sensei’s reaction heads in the opposite direction of mine.

“...Ah, that. The one where the president, Goshouin-san...”

She says while even letting out a wary sigh.

Just what have you done to make her like this, Master?

“Listen, Nishimura-kun.”

And to add on, she even voices out as though scolding me with a stern look on.

“As a teacher, I don’t intend on lecturing my students over their private hobbies, but personally, I can’t recommend online games. It really is dangerous getting too deep into them. It can even influence your life to a point beyond saving. And I think it would be best to not play them even at school.”

“Ugh... o-okay.”

I can’t say anything against all that.

I get it, but I can’t stop; that’s just how it is.

Still, she has a pretty good grasp of online games, huh?

“Huh, you know quite a lot about online games, don’t you, teacher?”

“Well, yes.”

I ask and she speaks softly, at a volume only I can hear.

“I played them a fair bit just a while ago.”

“Seriously?! Then, please, be our advisor!”

“Like I said, I won’t.”

She shows a wry smile before tapping my head with the attendance record.

“It’s important not plunging too deep into games like those. Students rarely have that restraint, so it’s best to not lay your hands on them.”

“But do you have the time for them as an adult?”

“That’s the problem, isn’t it?”

As though she wasn’t really stopping me in full seriousness, she simply shakes her head in resignation.

The bell chimes at that moment.

Her face jerks upwards and she turns towards the noisy class before speaking.

“Come on now, take your seats, everyone. I’ll be starting homeroom!”

The recruitment failed.

Nn, now what? If even a teacher who played them shows a reaction like this, it’s hardly going to go well with the other ones...

Though my worries continued on throughout the lessons, nothing good came to mind in the end.

Even the club activities starting did nothing against those worries.

The same goes for all four of us.

“Rusian, Master, I thought up of something good!”

“...I can’t imagine this leading to anything worthwhile, but go on.”

“I think that if the club’s abolished, we will only need to make a new one each time. Like, the Modern Communications-Electronics Recreation Club 2!”

“Ooh, that sounds good!”

“Don’t put an idea that risky into Master’s head!”

“...Hey, all of you.”

No matter how hard we pondered, over and over again, no answer came to mind.

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

I wander through the town late in the night.

Naturally, not the town in real life but the one in-game.

I obviously enjoy myself playing with Ako and the rest like always, but there’s this sense of enjoyment that comes with playing solo like this too. Like leisurely glancing through the stores or hunting with a different character from usual. I believe playing solo’s a source of enjoyment, too, when it comes to online games.

I’m the tank who endures enemies’ attacks from the front during party play, but I went back to hunting with the old great sword I used back then for today. Though it’s fun serving as my allies’ shield, I enjoy cutting apart enemies all I want too.

It’s just the thing to keep my mind off those worries.

Come to think of it, Ako said she wanted a new staff, didn’t she? She’s totally the type to throw a fortune into some cute,

amusing item if I were to leave her alone. Guess I'll take care of that before she does.

I meander through the town with that in mind. After passing through the user shop area where players set their own prices, I turn my legs towards the official auction house just as a female character with cat ears crossed my path while gazing across the shops.

“...Huh?”

Feeling that character's appearance to be somewhat familiar, I put a stop to Rusian's steps.

Made with an atmosphere far more trendy and cute than some serious battle MMO, characters in LA have quite a degree of customization available. It's rare enough even finding a similar character. What stimulated my memory was not just her appearance. This sight of her and me—Rusian equipped with a large sword—lined up triggered this sense of *déjà vu*.

Opening the options settings, I switch the usually unchecked 'Display All Characters' Names' on. This should show that person's name as well. I fix my mouse cursor on her to confirm her name—just as a bubble appears atop the girl.

□ Nekohime: Huh, Rusian? That's you, Rusian, is it nyot?

□ Rusian: Eh...

Seeing the name of the girl displayed on the screen alone is enough for me to conclude why I practically knew I had seen her before.

□ Nekohime: I knyew it was you, Rusian! Wow, that brings me back, nya!

The main reason for my trauma.

The cat girl whose adorable outward features hid the actual GIRL inside.

□ Rusian: Nekohime, san...

That Nekohime-san who was my angel two years back.

□ Nekohime: It's been a long time, Rusian. You're still playing this game even nyow?

□ Rusian: I-It's been a while. Of course I am.

I reply in the chat, shaken by Nekohime-san just as I remember him.

Calm down, down, down. It's been two years since. I'm different from how sad I was back then too.

<>N Thank goodnyess... You left in the guild after that, so I worried you might have left the game too, nya.

Looking on at Nekohime-san who apologized with the hands clasped together motion, I calmly conclude that she really is cute. Getting fooled back then was only understandable and justified.

□ Rusian: Of course I'm still around. Even after leaving the guild, I still talk to the members from then nowadays and I consider that time with you, Nekohime-san, to be a really fruitful experience. That formed the basis of my current creed.

□ Nekohime: Ooh, is it nyow? By the way, what is that creed?

□ Rusian: IRL doesn't matter, but there are no girls in online games!

□ Nekohime: Nyahahahaha

Clapping her hands together, Nekohime-san laughs in high spirits.

□ Nekohime: Those don't go together, nya. But I do get what you mean, nya.

Well, of course, you would, Nekohime-san and the man behind!

□ Rusian: So, what about you, Nekohime-san? I heard you disappeared a little while after I left.

□ Nekohime: I've been busy after I started work, nya. I only logged in for a bit after hearing about games IRL today for the first time in a while, but I'm nyot on much usually, nya.

□ Rusian: Oh, really?

So he's a working adult? He did say he was some old guy.

In that case, this meeting's quite an amazing coincidence.

I didn't expect it myself either, but with how we're speaking, it looks like I don't have any reservations at all towards Nekohime-san. In a sense, I seem to feel relieved instead, knowing he's a man inside. There's no need to keep up appearances after what we'd gone through; we can talk normally.

□ Rusian: Erm, Nekohime-san. If you're alright with it... mind if I consult you on a matter?

□ Nekohime: Hmm? What is it, nya?

The older girl I first fell in love with—nah, I mean, he's some old guy, but I still begin speaking about Ako, feeling as though I'm relying on someone like that.

□ Rusian: ——And so, she can't tell RL and the game apart at all and no matter how hard I work at it, it just doesn't work out.

□ Nekohime: I see, nya, sounds like you've got it hard, nya.

Though it ended up rather long, Nekohime-sama listened to all of it without getting distracted.

And at the end, she nods solemnly as she speaks.

□ Nekohime: I think what you're doing is correct, nya, Rusian. That girl is, well... at risk, nya. It's okay nyow since Rusian's a particular good boy, but she would have gone through something extremely harsh if she had taken even another step wrong, nya. I see you truly treasure her, Rusian. You should be proud of yourself, nya.

□ Rusian: I'm relieved if you think so.

That's right, isn't it? If I wasn't the one who met Ako, that level of trust she has would have put her in great danger. I'm all the more worried now after really getting to know her. Of her being fooled by some shady man.

□ Nekohime: Besides, men who go "We're married in-game, so you're my wife IRL too, guhehe" disgust me, nya.

□ Rusian: I do understand that! That's exactly why I want to do something about it, you know?!

You didn't have to point that out! I'm no e-flirt, I'm not anyone like that!

□ Nekohime: Nyahaha, I'm just kidding, nya.

After laughing so, Nekohime-san continues.

□ Nekohime: Still, I have read research about the harmful influences, the perils children put themselves into lately after becoming too attached to the cyberspace, nya, but... it certainly isn't a pretty picture experiencing it first-hand like this, is it, nya?

With something somewhat difficult.

□ Rusian: Research?

□ Nekohime: Aah, you can ignore that, nya.

Does he work in a related field? No, honestly, I don't have any interest about what Nekohime-san is like in real life and would rather not know, though.

Nekohime-san goes, "Hmm", troubled.

□ Nekohime: Of course, you should do what you feel best with regards to that girl, nya, Rusian. It would be best to talk it out with the both of you, nya. But on the other hand, I believe it just as important to convey to her that her way of thinking could lead to problems, nya. It may be dangerous if she were to end up meeting with some other man aside from Rusian, nya.

□ Rusian: That's true, I do worry about how things would go if she kept it up... Thank you very much, that's a load off my mind. I guess I'll find a good time to discuss it with her, after all.

□ Nekohime: That's for the best, nya. Nekohime-san's relieved too, with such levelheaded kids around, nya.

□ Rusian: A-Ahaha...

I can't help but let out a bitter laugh if he's going to say something that stodgy.

□ Nekohime: Well, anyway, it's getting late, nya. It's about time for good students to go to bed, nya.

□ Rusian: Got it. Erm, if you're okay with it, would you mind if I consult with you again?

□ Nekohime: Of course, nya.

Nekohime-san cheerfully says.

□ Nekohime: I'm concerned if everything turns out for the best too, nya, so I'll log in from time to time, nya. Do call out to me whenever you see me, nya.

□ Rusian: Thank you very much!

Our nostalgic chance meeting ends on that note.

Yep, that's right, I really should speak with Ako. That's the best for Ako herself too.

“Good morning, my darling. ♪”

“.....Ako, no, Tamaki-san.”

Learning nothing from her previous experiences, Ako comes yet again the next morning.

There's a part of me attracted to her, showing only genuine warmth without the slightest tinge of ill will, but I stifle that with Nekohime-san's words and speak out strongly.

“Tamaki-san, that's not right.”

“...Rusian?”

“I'm not Rusian but Nishimura.”

“Eh, ah, yes, Nishimura-kun.”

It's good that she listens to that much.

I take a deep breath and continue looking straight into Ako's face.

“Hey, Tamaki-san, I said this countless times already, but it's different in the game and in real life. We are married in the game, but we are only normal schoolmates in the same grade outside of it. I don't mind at all talking with you normally, but it does trouble me when you approach me without any distrust like this.”

“.....”

“Besides, this isn't just about me. Don't you think it's dangerous letting your guard down so much without knowing the other party well enough? It'll be good for you, too, Tamaki-san.—You understand, don't you?”

“.....”

I had prepared quite a bit before saying all that, but Ako shows no response in particular and stares straight towards me. Unlike the shock she showed when I first said that the game

was different from real life, this is more of an inquisitive expression. Why would she have such a look on?

“That’s why you shouldn’t call me your husband or say that we’re married so easily, you should show more restraint, so we —”

“Rusian, who were you talking to?”

“...Huh?”

Ako-san? Whatever could you be saying?

“You met someone, didn’t you? And that someone told you something? Who? It’s not Master, neither is it Schw-chan. It’s someone else, someone aside from them, someone who was able to influence you, Rusian. And who is that? Hey, Rusian, who is that?”

Ako speaks indifferently yet draws closer towards me with those words.

“C-Calm down, Ako.”

“I am perfectly calm, aren’t I?”

“Y-Yeah, I guess.”

Ako’s words and attitude are calm. On that note, I’m the one in a fluster. I’d even turned back to calling her Ako instead, now that I noticed.

That said, she looks completely out of it somewhere unseen, somewhere invisible on the surface. How do I say this? It’s like a boss monster whose movement patterns change upon suffering damage, that’s it.

—That's way too scary.

I shiver from those terrifying thoughts and Ako opens her mouth with that flat expression still on.

“Rusian, could that someone be female?”

“N-No, no, that's not it.”

“I see, so she is.”

She speaks while peering into my eyes.

Hold on, wait, aren't you misunderstanding things?! Don't hold such conviction in your misunderstanding!

“W-What is it, Ako? What's gotten into you?”

“Listen, Rusian. Wives are capable of seeing through their husbands' affairs with a single look.”

Ako says with a perfectly composed look.

You don't get it! You aren't getting it despite asserting that so confidently!

“No, no, no, I haven't been cheating on you with anyone!”

Wait, in the first place, we aren't like that, Ako!

“Sure, I did ask that someone for advice. His avatar's a female character, but it's okay. It's a he inside.”

“...So she is female.”

Her voice comes in, though I'm not sure that came from my ears or somewhere else.

This is getting scarier by the minute, b-but is this okay?

“I’ll say this until you’re satisfied, but he’s—or rather, he’s apparently some old guy, you know? You don’t have to worry about a thing, okay, Ako?”

“Ahaha, what are you talking about? I’m not bothered in the slightest.”

Your tone’s bright, but those eyes aren’t laughing at all, Ako.

“Still, Rusian, I would love to greet her myself, so would you mind giving me her name?”

“...That scared me the most out of everything you’ve said so far, Ako.”

“What are you saying, Rusian? I’m not quite sure I understand.”

Ako speaks with a smile that looks pasted on. I’m the one not getting you, you hear?

“I mean, what kind of greeting would that be? There’s no need at all to greet some simple friend of mine.”

“After all, she took some time to listen you out and even dispensed that ‘valuable’ advice, didn’t she? It would be my absolute pleasure to exchange some words with her.

“I will never say it!”

Scary, scary, scaary!

“It’s okay, please tell me.”

“I won’t.”

“It appears you don’t know when to give up... not even I can hold back my anger from reaching rapture, you know...?”

“Your Japanese’s turning weird, hey.”

It seems Ako truly is angry, but that anger’s directed in an odd direction. She’s not angry over how I first said to consider our positions, but more over the influence on me from Nekohime-san’s words. Is that anger or jealousy?

“Rusian... if you resist any further, you’re getting shipped.”

“S-Shipped? Where?!”

“Rusian’s getting shipped!”

Ako howls.

Woah, Ako’s going mad! What am I, livestock?!

“Everyone, take your seats, the bell’s going to ring.”

The teacher comes in with excellent timing.

“Now, let’s start homeroom. Tamaki-san, you should be on your way back.”

“Mghh... okay...”

Ako’s shyness is as always: seems she lacks the will to retort against a teacher regardless of how incensed she gets.

I rack my brain over what I should be doing with Ako as she turns back countless times while leaving the classroom.

□ Rusian: ...And that’s how it was all exposed.

Several days later, I ended up consulting with Nekohime-san in LA once again. It may make Ako that much more mad if she finds out, but life will go on.

□ Nekohime: You're easy to read, after nya, Rusian.

Nekohime-san laughs cheerfully at my story.

□ Rusian: I don't think that can all be summed up with me being easy to read. I was almost shipped out.

□ Nekohime: Ranran's getting shipped out, nya.

Stop it with the shipping out, please.

Nekohime-san continues onto a new subject with a "Putting that aside, nya".

□ Nekohime: Still, Rusian. That might mean she has always been looking at you, nya. Perhaps her feelings are real, nya?

Real—in what sense?

Isn't thinking like that the first step towards becoming an e-flirt?

□ Rusian: That's... what is it, are you against me too, Nekohime-san?

□ Nekohime: I'm just kidding, nya. But Rusian, Getting too worked up isn't good either, nya. If you push her too large, you might just set off a huge bomb, nya?

□ Rusian: That... sounds scary, but

That time was close enough to a small explosion, so how would a huge one end up? I won't even know how to start apologizing if Segawa, sitting nearby, gets involved and set off secondary explosions.

□ Nekohime: ...Huh?

A question mark pops atop Nekohime-san's head with that and she looks across the area.

□ Rusian: What is it?

□ Nekohime: It's just... a message from someone, nya. I apologize, but I'll take my leave here, nya. Rusian, let's talk again, nya?

Oh, a message from someone else?

Nekohime-san's has always been popular, I wouldn't be surprised if he gets messages from all sort of people. I almost feel bad for having him spend his meager login time on me like this.

□ Rusian: Yes, of course. Thank you very much for hearing me out.

□ Nekohime: I'm sorry for not listening until the end, nya. Let's talk over it properly next time, nya.

□ Rusian: Yes, see you.

I see off Nekohime-san as she leaves.

It's always so relaxing talking with her. Guess this is what they mean by experience coming with age.

Now then, I should check through the shops' goods and log off —or so I was thinking before my eyes land on a familiar silhouette.

A black-haired female character clothed in a white robe.

A familiar guild emblem shows atop her head just like over mine.

The one I didn't want to see most at this time.

□ Ako: Fufufu... I saw that, Rusian...

□ Rusian: Y-You... Ako...

She saw me. Ako saw me discussing with Nekohime-san.

I feel Ako's wrath through the monitor. Crap, though it's not exactly like what Nekohime-san said, I can't help fretting over this ending as a huge explosion. What can I do, what can I do?

□ Ako: So that person earlier was the person you asked for advice from?

□ Rusian: Y-Yeah. That's right.

I answer in dread and Ako shows the emoticon for overflowing anger as she howls.

□ Ako: So, she... girls who go “Nya♪” like that are to your tastes, Rusian?! Are you saying that she's your ideal?!

□ Rusian: Like I said, we aren't like—

□ Ako: So, Rusian, that type's to your tastes, nya?!

□ Rusian: I don't have anything for ending sentences with that! You didn't have to change that!

On that note, Ako's like a cat with its fur standing on end and going “fukii!”.

Woah, she's mad, Ako's mad.

Not to mention, this is, unfortunately, in the game unlike normally. Even when considering her slight tendency towards jealousy, the fault lies with me.

It's not like I won't feel a little jealous if I were to see Ako happily talking with another man in-game either.

That's why I should be resolving this misunderstanding and apologizing—

□ Rusian: That's not it, it's not like that, that's just a somewhat old acquaintance. Didn't I say before, about that GIRL I confessed to? That's Nekohime-san.

At any rate, let's try explaining the situation in detail. I meekly speak without hiding anything.

Ako keeps her silence for some time at that before pressing me further.

□ Ako: The one Rusian confessed to... what...

Ah, not good, I might have gone and said too much.

Ako's anger getting worse.

□ Ako: I won't forgive that envio... luc... outrageo... erm, GIRL who, erm, betrayed you so horribly

□ Rusian: Your thoughts are getting out despite you typing this out.

□ Ako: I wanted a proposal from Rusian too! Tell me you love me!

□ Rusian: No, I am sorry about that...

Looks like Ako has been holding back quite some stress.

From her point of view, my wanting to widen the distances between us in real life may have been difficult on her. I should apologize properly. That was when Ako typed into the chat.

□ Ako: With things at this stage, I'll have to teach that woman a lesson...

□ Rusian: Wait, stop that, you idiot!

Hey, hey, hey, Nekohime-san has nothing to do with this!

What do you have in mind for her?!

I speak in a fluster towards Ako on the verge of berserking.

□ Rusian: Listen, there are lines even when it comes to jokes. I was just getting advice and nothing else. I'll never forgive you if you cause any trouble, you hear? Go ahead and complain to me all you like, I'll apologize, but please don't pull others in.

□ Ako: Rusian... you like her that much...?

□ Rusian: I said you were wrong. I'm serious in saying that this time. I don't like it when you don't listen, Ako.

□ Ako: Ugh... but... I understand...

Ako doesn't seem satisfied but still nodded. She nodded, but... will she really be okay? Don't cause any problems for Nekohime-san, please.

Whether she knew of those feelings of mine or not, Ako hurried away from me.

□ Ako: Well, I have a little something to handle, so I'll be going now.

□ Rusian: Handle?

□ Ako: I likely won't be at the usual place today.

□ Rusian: ...I see. I'll see you, then.

□ Ako: Okaay

After saying so, she ran off somewhere.

She said she wouldn't, but still, she might—I waited at the cafe with that mind, but in the end, Ako didn't come.

In actual fact, it's really, really rare for Ako who's around practically everyday to be away from the usual place.

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

“Just what is she thinking...”

I stare off into space in the morning classroom with my bag left atop my desk.

I would have been chatting with one person or another in the past, but with Ako regularly coming over daily, I ended up waiting for her. There she would be, gently pulling on my sleeve while I talked to my classmates; not to mention the effectively murderous glares from those still single too. It's no use just saying that we aren't like that.

“Okay, good morning, everyone.”

Saitou-sensei enters a little before the bell rings.

She heads towards the teaching platform—and stops her feet before me.

“Hold on, Nishimura-kun, Tamaki-san isn't here today?”

“Eh? Aah, Ako... Tamaki-san? Erm, we didn't have anything on in particular, so I wouldn't know, but I guess she's not? It's this late and all.”

“Hmm.”

Saitou-sensei has a complicated look on as she looks at me.

Why would she ask about Ako?

“So, what about it?”

I ask and she speaks with an extremely solemn expression.

“Listen, Nishimura-kun, are you dating Tamaki-san?”

“Fuohh?!”

That strange noise leaked out. You’re asking your student that, teacher?! Where’s the subtlety?!

“N-No, no. We aren’t like that.”

“Really? I won’t say anything about illicit sexual relationships and such, so there’s no need to hold back, you know?”

Yeah, I get that. You aren’t all that strict as a teacher, after all. I’m sure of that much, just by the fact that you played online games previously.

“Really really. Ako just doesn’t have many friends, that’s probably why she’s with me.”

“...That’s true.”

Saitou-sensei surprisingly nods and speak after I make up a desperate excuse that I didn’t think she would believe while waving my hands.

“You see, I serve as the Literary Club’s advisor, so the library assistants are under me too. Tamaki-san is one of them too, so I had called out to her several times during the meetings. However, she just wouldn’t speak. After I asked her class’s homeroom teacher, it seems she’s always silent in class too.”

“Seriously?”

“Yes, seriously.”

She wasn’t kidding around when she said she had no friends, after all?

She said she often takes breaks from school too, but... hmm, yeah, even when hearing it from others like this, it just doesn’t feel Ako-ish.

“She’s totally different in front of me, though...”

“Yes, that’s why I was shocked. Wow, I didn’t think she’s like that! You know? I was thinking along the lines of her being herself in front of her boyfriend, though.”

“That’s not it, she stinks of geekishness too, she’s just able to speak in front of her fellow comrades.”

“...Well, that does happen...”

She nods. So she really did experience that?

Guess people like us really do get a pointless buff to all of our stats in front of those we can understand. That’s that forced debuff in front of those we can’t in return, though.

“...Hey, Nishimura-kun, how about you try going over to Tamaki-san’s class next time?”

“Huh, why?”

“If they see how Tamaki-san acts before you, I’m thinking that she can make some friends in her class too.”

“Good idea, isn’t it?”, she happily says.

Still, should I?

“I wonder, there’s the chance that she ends up not replying even when spoken to in the end, making it needlessly awkward.”

“Ahaha, there isn’t. There are some geeks hidden among the girls too.”

“...Is that so?”

“Yes, there are. In our class, there’s Segawa and such, right?”

“.....”

I maintain my “no comment” stance after she says so with a bright smile.

Oh, Schwein, how pathetic it is, to think you’ve been exposed...

Schw and Master were already there when I reached the clubroom after getting through my cleaning duties after classes.

However, I don’t see the girl who I wanted to see most.

“Eh, where’s Ako?”

“That’s the first thing you say? Shouldn’t you be saying something else?”

Spinning her chair, Segawa glares this way. Her face’s pretty cute after you get used to it.

“Yeah, good morning, Segawa.”

“...How about you say that in the morning? It’s evening.”

Aren't you the one who gets mad if I call out to you in the morning?

I apologize despite thinking that inside.

"Greetings are important, good afternoon, Rusian. ...Now then, with regards to Ako, it appears she has taken the day off according to what I ascertained at the staff room."

"...From the club?"

"The school."

"Duh, she doesn't look like the type to come to school and skip the club."

"Well, yeah."

Her taking frequent breaks from school in the first place have been backed up by a teacher and herself, so I suppose this would have happened eventually.

I was somewhat uneasy that it might have been my fault, but it's all right if that's how it is, maybe?

"Anyway, be sure to tell me early if we're taking the day off. You even made me walk all the way here to the clubroom."

Segawa shrugs, picks up her bag, and gets off her seat.

"Huh, you aren't playing?"

"If we were doing this for the sake of changing how Ako thinks, what's the point when she isn't around?"

"That's true, but..."

Still, there isn't much time we have left in this club.

We won't be in school over the weekends starting tomorrow. After the first staff meeting happening next week, they would declare this club abolished. I don't know when they would do it—but it wouldn't even be odd for today to be our last time.

“I guess I will. Master, what about you?”

I look at Master and she laughs and nods.

“Certainly, I will accompany you. The club could hardly run properly without its president.”

“It would, thanks.”

She walks to her computer and turns it on. She sits down on the chair and watches as it starts up—

“...Now then.”

“...Yeah?”

Both of us turn our looks upon Segawa who, despite standing from her seat, remains immobile within the room.

“Ugh... i-if you insist so much, I guess I'll play with you.”

“Not like we said anything.”

“Shuddup.”

You just can't be honest until the end, even if you wanted to participate in the club activities.

“We don't have a healer, so let's not go too far.”

“It's not like it would really change much with her around or not.”

“Ako isn't that bad either, hey.”

I log in into the game with a bitter smile.

And there—

□ Rusian: ...Why are you here?

□ Ako: Ah, Rusian. Good morning.

As though it's only natural, Ako's there despite taking the day off.

“Just what is she doing?”

“That would be how Ako is, wouldn't it?”

Master shows a composed smile but I can't help but interject.

□ Rusian: Don't you good morning me, what's with school, weren't you resting?

□ Ako: ...I have something important up, so I had to deal with the various preparations at home.

Ako seems rather hesitant.

She would reply instantly normally no matter what I ask. The presence she's giving off is obvious enough.

□ Rusian: Something important? What's up? No, you don't have to reply if it's not something you should be saying.

□ Ako: Erm... I was getting ready for an offline meeting.

Ako says something odd.

“Offline meeting? Master, did you have something planned again?”

“I did not?”

Master shakes her head.

Then, what's with that offline meeting?

The Alleycats guild's next offline meeting... I can interpret it as that?

□ Rusian: You want to organize the next offline meeting, Ako?

I hesitantly ask and Ako shakes her head.

□ Ako: No, I am personally meeting with another person I know.

□ Rusian: Oh... what did you say?

This can't end well.

She would explode spectacularly if I press too hard—I recall Nekohime's words.

“She's...”

“Meeting with someone aside from us offline?”

“That's ridiculous.”

I timidly ask after exchanging looks with the pair.

□ Rusian: An offline meeting with just the both of you... with a girl, right?

□ Ako: ...He said he was male himself.

□ Rusian: Wait, hey!

“Haah?! Don't screw with me?!”

“Oh wow, looks like she's serious. What do we do about this?”

“Hmm...?”

Schw has a complicated expression on while Master's doubtful.

No, putting them aside, what about Ako? What is she thinking?

□ Rusian: Stop it, you idiot, why are you putting yourself at risk?

□ Ako: It's no danger at all, it's necessary.

□ Rusian: To meet with some man IRL?!

□ Ako: That's... anyway, nothing you're afraid of will happen, Rusian, so please do not worry.

□ Rusian: Even if you say that...

That's just what Ako thinks, there's no telling what the other party has in mind.

Geez, no helping it. I am a little worried and there's that with Nekohime-san too; I should follow up at least.

□ Rusian: Ah, then I'll go too. There's no issue with me going if it's an LA offline meeting, right?

□ Ako: T-That's... you can't!

“...Eh?”

Ako showed a shocking level of rejection to my proposal.

□ Rusian: Why's that, I know almost everyone you know, anyway, Ako...

□ Ako: You can't, definitely! No matter what, I especially won't take you with me, Rusian!

“...What's that supposed to mean.”

Especially me, she says?

I'm worried for you here—I don't intend to begrudge her on that at all, but it is annoying with her refusing that hard. What will you do if something really happens? There's no undoing it later on.

I fret over the words I should tell Ako before chat messages from Master and Schw who logged in after me appears.

□ Schwein: Hold on, Ako, this isn't like you. Rusian's even putting him out to accompany you, why are you so insistent on refusing?

□ Apricot: Indeed, normally, you would have pulled him along in bliss, Ako, making a ruckus over him being your husband, wouldn't you? What is the matter?

□ Ako: Ugh...

Ako goes silent at the pair's question.

I didn't go that far, though.

□ Rusian: No, I'm not saying you should bring me along because we're married or anything. Games are different from real life and it's not like I want to go to show off that status. That said, it definitely is dangerous, I'm not berating you or anything, but it's best if you aren't alone, even if it's not me, how about Schw or Master—

Go with you—Ako's chat message appeared before I typed that out.

□ Ako: R-Right. I mean, games are different from RL, aren't they?!

□ Rusian: ...Huh?

Those words look like they were typed out in a hurry.

That was definitely not an Ako-ish way to saying it, but what really astonished me was the content of that message.

□ Ako: Rusian, you always say that the game is different from RL, don't you? Even when I ask what's so different, you wouldn't give a proper answer yet insist that the game is different from real life. ...So even if I meet with someone else IRL, how would it matter to you, Rusian?

□ Rusian: A-Ako... you...

My hands stop typing.

Ako's words exceeded my thoughts that much.

□ Ako: Or rather, why are you so worried about me, Rusian? Aren't you the one acting strange, then? You aren't married to me IRL, so we're just strangers without anything at all binding us, aren't we? Games are different from real life, aren't they?

There were nothing wrong with Ako's words.

I did say so. I didn't go as far as to claim we are strangers, but I'm certainly in no position to forbid her from meeting with another man. Rather, I had always been telling Ako that I can't be in that position, that I won't.

Hence—

□ Ako: Rusian, what's so different between games and real life?

“.....”

I can say nothing in reply to those words.

With her character taking one, two steps away as I descend into silence, Ako speaks.

□ Ako: So, I'll be going. That's fine with you, isn't it, Rusian?

Games are different from real life. So it doesn't matter. I have no right to interfere. Not even the right to worry. Not even the right to reply her and to let her go.

—Well, yeah, that's exactly right, I don't have any words to answer her.

But still, hey, you, did you have to say that here and now?!

Aah, fine, I get it, go ahead if that's what you want!

□ Rusian: ...Yeah, do as you like.

“Wait, Rusian?!”

“Are you sane, Rusian?”

The pair answers in real life to the in-game chat message. That's annoying in its own way. What's wrong with that, it has nothing to do with me, anyway!

□ Rusian: It's as you said. I'm not your husband in real life, so I have absolutely nothing to do with you meeting someone there. I have no reason at all to stop you! Well, I'm sorry, for meddling in someone else's business! How about you go and enjoy yourself?! It's not like it has anything to do with me, whatever happens to you!

I strike them hard enough to hurt my fingers and shut down LA's client immediately after.

I don't want to talk to Ako any longer, neither do I want to see her.

"Rusian, what Ako has said is justified in accordance with your usual behavior. There is no reason for you snapping at her."

Master says and I glare hard at her and reply.

"I get it, I get that! But even if I get it, I can't accept it, that's why I can't say anything, how about you understand that much!"

"M-My apologies."

"Don't apologize, why should you apologize, Master? Besides, Ako is the one acting weird. She would never say that usually, knowing how Rusian would react. I'll go ask her, so hold on... ah, hey!"

Ignoring Schw typing away on her keyboard, I stand from my seat and head out of the clubroom.

"It's fine, don't bother. This is okay. Ako gets that games are different from real life and accepts that we aren't married in real life. The club served its purpose too, and I'm no e-flirt. What's so bad about it all? Even if something horrible happens to Ako, who cares?!"

"Wha, you, wait—"

I slam the door shut with all my might.

Aah, this pisses me off.

Of course I'm pissed off. That Ako's meeting with some guy alone by herself offline; doesn't she get how dangerous that is?

Why did she think I was trying so desperately to get her to see that?

And not to mention, even if I were to ignore her meeting with that man offline after all that in the end, she goes on about how games are different from real life to just me... aah, that's right, they are different, there's nothing between us. She's just all lively in front of me because we connect on those topics! I'm just someone like a closet geek friend who she can talk about stuff like that with! That's nothing special between us!

But, but!

Damn it, something just pisses me off!

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

It's morning, the start of a new day with the sun high in the sky, and yet the irritation still remains in my chest.

I roll over on my bed and look up at the ceiling.

My mind's foggy, it's absolutely murky in there.

Even when I shut my eyes and try to think about anything else, all that pops up in my head is Ako.

Rusian, Rusian—the image of Ako's smile as she nudges up to me sticks to my consciousness and refuses to let go.

It's evening now. She must have met with that man by now.

I wonder if she would have on that smile that I thought she would only show before me?

I wonder, would she have that smile I thought she would show only before me when she's with that other man too?

What the heck are these emotions filling me when I imagine that scene? Did I have that much excess energy to spare? I tighten my grip as though to expend that. But still, that was still lacking and I clench down on my teeth hard.

“Ghh...”

A mild taste of blood spreads throughout my mouth.

That taste reeking of metal stimulates those horrible scenes in my imagination.

Has Ako gotten into anything dangerous? Has anything horrible happened to her?

My body trembles from those thoughts alone, resisting any attempt to stay still.

It may be more relaxing to just run out now. Maybe I should. But I remain in my room as an eternity passes.

I can't tear those words from Ako at the end from my mind even now.

[Rusian, what's so different between games and real life?]

Even now, I have no reply for that from Ako.

“Aah, geez, damn it.”

I get up and start up the computer in my room.

Absentmindedly starting up LA.

I thought Ako could be around, but naturally, she isn't.

Instead, both Master and Schw are sitting there. Thinking they have great timing, I call out to them, but chat bubbles appear on their heads before I could.

□ Apricot: So you're here, Rusian.

□ Schwein: Hold on, exactly what are you doing here?!

Having abandoned her roleplaying as Schwein, Segawa approaches me straight away.

What is it, just what are you on about?

□ Rusian: That's some greeting, huh, what is it?

□ Schwein: What do you mean, what is it, she's—

□ Apricot: Now, now, calm down, Schw.

Master speaks while patting Schw's shoulder.

□ Apricot: Schw's went to the trouble of asking yesterday, but it appears Ako's offline meeting is set at six in the evening.

Evening? Six?

What's with that, what's that guy dragging a high school girl out at night for?!

□ Rusian: Evening? He's totally doing of doing it, isn't he?

□ Apricot: Indeed. It seems he would be coming to Maegasaki as well. That was apparently Ako's condition.

□ Rusian: So he wants to meet her that bad? Damn, no matter how you think about it, this is definitely bad, right? Just why can't that idiot get it?

I look at the clock; it's just a bit more to six.

I grip my phone, thinking to call on an impulse.

But my fingers refuse to press its buttons. I would be connected to Ako with those few presses, yet these buttons feel terribly heavy.

I mean, look, what would I do if Ako didn't pick up?

Even if she picks up, what would I do if she sounds bothered?

What would I do if I heard some unknown man speaking from beyond the phone call?

And even if she were to be happy over a phone call from me—what could I say to that?

□ Schwein: Why aren't you going?

□ Rusian: ...Eh?

Schw swings his sword about on the screen.

□ Schwein: You don't stay that far from the station, do you? You can still make it.

□ Rusian: To go... even if you tell me that...

I look at my room's clock after she speaks. True, it's still a little before six and if I leave this instant and go by bicycle, I may make it.

□ Rusian: But... it's not like I have any right to.

□ Schwein: What right? What kind of stupid right do you need when a friend's in danger?!

□ Rusian: Ako personally said she wants to meet with him alone. You're telling me to budge into that? I don't have any right to... she even said that.

At best, friends; at worst, schoolmates in the same grade.

I don't have any such right if Ako's against it. That's why I'm so bothered, why can't you understand?

□ Schwein: What's with that, you're so stupid! Lame! I didn't think you were such a shitty guy!

“Oh, shuddap..”

Those words that stopped being annoying when Schw turned out to be Segawa now pricked deep into me.

I'm already this annoyed and you're still going on about that?

Maybe I should smash this irritating monitor for real.

Seriously.

□ Schwein: Well, duh, of course, Ako wouldn't like someone so pathetic. Like, I have no idea why would she even fall for you at all in the first place. That's right, I suppose that's all fine, she'll be better off tossing a husband like you aside and going for another man!

“Hh!”

The image of Ako cuddling beside another man floats into my mind.

It's just my imagination; what's with this pain in my chest, really?

□ Rusian: Why do I have to hear all this from you?!

□ Schwein: Aren't the two of you married?! It's because you aren't doing anything!

□ Rusian: What married, that's just in the game, isn't it?!

What's the point of pressing so hard, what's with that girl?

She's been spouting off all that just to annoy me further since earlier.

□ Schwein: That doesn't matter! You can do anything if only you put your mind to it!

□ Rusian: You just don't get it! I'm annoyed exactly because I can't do anything, that's why I'm worrying, that's why I can't get Ako out of my head!

□ Schwein: ...Hey, you.

I vent my irritation on Schw despite understanding how I'm acting.

That said, for some reason, Schw shows no sign of anger and just shakes his head in resignation.

□ Schwein: Listen, you like Ako, don't you? That's fine, then, just get going already.

In return, she even goes and says something as absurd as that. Just what is this person going on about?

□ Rusian: You listen, there's no way that's true.

□ Schwein: That is true, darn it! That's all it looks like! Look up the chat log from a little while ago, you!

□ Rusian: I'm in no mood for that, why can't you read my mood a little...

□ Schwein: Eeehh?!

I'm this bothered over Ako and despite that, Schw's shooting her mouth off. She should think before she speak, aren't there more important things right now?

□ Apricot: I have been thinking, Rusian... no, Nishimura Hideki-kun.

And Master who has been watching us in silence speaks.

□ Apricot: I believe you understand, but if I were to choose, I stand closer to Ako. I don't believe there is too much of a need to separate the game and real life.

I know. If I left you alone with Ako, she would have pulled you over entirely, that's why Segawa's dragged in: to balance things out; it's not like you separated the game and real life much from the beginning either.

□ Apricot: From my point of view, you see, Ako mixes the game with real life far too much, but I believe, you, too, separates the game with real life far too much.

□ Rusian: Separating them too much? Then, what, you want to go between Ako and that guy, going on about how we're married? Well, yeah, I do think it would be nice if I can do that, though.

□ Schwein: No, Rusian, you see, it's all in what you've just said.

□ Apricot: I had no intention of going that far.

Schw seems to have said something in the corner of my sight, but I figured I would read it later and continue the conversation.

□ Apricot: As you do believe, Rusian and Nishimura Hideki are different. Ako and Tamaki Ako, too, are different. You are not in a relationship with Ako in reality. ...But you see, aren't you

dismissing this “Rusian” who fell for Ako in the game far too much?

□ Rusian: Dismissing... what do you mean?

I’m undervaluing “Rusian”... is that what she’s saying?

I’m belittling him too much because he’s me in-game?

□ Apricot: Rusian is inside of you. Ako is inside of Tamaki Ako. Those are undeniable truths. And that the conclusion those lead to, is that you hold a liking for Ako-kun inside of you—am I wrong there?

Master grins like in real life.

I like Ako inside—because “Rusian” inside of me is thinking of “Ako” inside Tamaki Ako.

That may be true. The logic holds.

But, still—that’s just, that’s just.

□ Rusian: I can’t just accept that.

No, that’s not it. Those murky feelings in me aren’t from that.

□ Rusian: That’s not all to it, that’s not all to my feelings. Meeting, talking, coming into contact with her, and even coming to like those parts of her that aren’t quite “Ako”. The one I’m worried for now isn’t the in-game “Ako” but the one in real life, smiling so brightly by my side. I’m worried about that, I don’t want her to get hurt.

□ Apricot: ...I see.

□ Schwein: Look, you just said it! You said you like her! Hey, can't you hear what I'm saying? What is this, lag? Did you add me to your blacklist? Is the chat not working? Hello?!

I continue the conversation while ignoring the chat messages from both Master and Schw.

Master nods deeply at my words and speaks, satisfied.

□ Apricot: So you do understand, don't you, Rusian. That is enough. You have finally found your answer.

Master says with a *hmm* while nodding deeply.

What answer? Answer for what?

What to do about Ako? What can be done to help Ako? Was there an answer to a question like that?

No, or maybe—I see.

□ Rusian: The answer to those words from Ako.

□ Apricot: Indeed.

What's so different between the game and real life, she said. I don't understand, you're acting strange, Rusian, she said.

But there was nothing strange about my actions.

The answer is simple. Really simple.

After all, there are plenty of things in real life that the game lacks.

Voices calling out to each other, smiles exchanged, touching fingertips, her scent that I have grown used to before I knew it. Those many things I never would have known within the game.

Perhaps Ako hates all of herself in real life, a lonely girl with no friends.

But that's not true.

I feel glad, knowing those parts of her I would never have in the game. Unlike "Rusian" who only knows a mere facet of Tamaki Ako. I feel more, much more, for her.

□ Rusian: That's why they're different. The game is different from real life. I'm not mistaken in the slightest.

□ Apricot: That will do if you believe so.

My mood cleared up slightly. There are words I should tell her the next time I meet with her.

As expected as our Master, how dependable.

Still, the situation is as it was.

□ Rusian: But in the end, that changes nothing, there's nothing that can be done.

I sighed before typing that.

No matter what I think, Ako will meet that guy. She may run into danger. But I have no right to hamper that.

□ Schwein: Hey, you listening? That's enough already, just go and tell them, "I'm here to help out my bride". You want to, don't you?

□ Rusian: Like I said, we're married only in the game...

My hands froze upon typing that far.

Bride. That's right, Ako's my bride.

Well, yeah, it's different in real life, but she's certainly my bride in-game.

That remains the same even now, I love her.

□ Rusian: ...Right, she was **my bride**.

□ Schwein: Hah?

That's right, that's it.

She's my bride. She's certainly my bride in LA.

Ako's my bride and yet she's meeting with someone from the game in real life?

Then, how could her husband from the game leave that alone?!

After all, she's meeting with a man she met in-game!

That's enough for an excuse! IT's perfect!

□ Rusian: Haha, hahahahaha! Well, of course, I would get annoyed! It's only natural!

□ Schwein: R-Rusian?

Ignoring Schw who's drawing away, I pat her character's shoulder.

□ Rusian: I knew it, Schw, you get it, don't you! I don't feel depressed at all now! Alright, just you wait, you damned bastard who's trying to lay his hands on my Ako! I'll kill you, how dare you try something on another's bride!

Both Rusian and I grip our fists tightly.

That's right, it's so obvious. Like I would hand Ako over to anyone else.

□ Schwein: C-Calm down, let's calm down, okay? There's no need to get into any trouble here, okay?

□ Rusian: Leave it to me, I'll take care of it all.  
I boldly guarantee.

□ Schwein: No, that's why I can't leave it to you...

□ Apricot: Hahaha, do your worst, Rusian.

□ Rusian: Yeah!

□ Schwein: H-Hold on?!

Schw said something again, but I have already jumped out of my room without even shutting down LA's client. Whizzing along while clinging on tight to my bicycle, I step hard onto the pedals with all I have.

Just wait, you idiot, I'm on my way now... you're my bride, how can I accept you meeting offline with another man as your in-game husband?!

Consciously ignoring the part inside myself coolly considering how I'm going overboard with the self-justification, I step on the pedals with enough force to break my legs.

By the time I reached the station and practically tossed the bicycle away as I got off, Ako was, wonderfully enough, just exiting the ticket gate.

“Ako... so you're really here?”

Without any sign of noticing me trying to get my breathing back under control, Ako peers into her phone as she nervously

walks forward and glances around. There's nothing I can nitpick about her outfit, it's adorable as always. It had a slightly more mature air during our offline meeting the other time, but her skirt seems shorter and she's somewhat more daring this time. Is she anticipating something? —I drown out that thought as soon as it came to me.

“Anyway, I'll have to first stop her and——wha!”

A shadow calls out towards Ako the moment I turn towards her.

Ako's expression quickly turns soft upon hearing that—so that's who she's meeting offline?

The silhouette's petite and slightly shorter than even me. I can't tell from behind, but this must be that man. And judging from his clothes, he gives off an air of being older than us. He must be some university student—no, a working adult.

Aah, I get it. Despite already in the workforce, he's a player who goes as far as to hunt for female high school students in online games.

That's totally the worst. As a human, a man, an online game player, and Ako's husband, there's no way I will approve of him, no way I can approve of him.

“Akoooooooo!!”

I shout out loud without concern for anyone watching and dash to her side at full speed.

My legs hurt with each step, reflecting how out of shape I am, but that's nothing if it means Ako's safety.

“R-Rusian?!”

Ako’s eyes turn round upon noticing me. After running before her as though to dive into those eyes, I grab her and pull her away from that man.

“Eh, R-Rusian?”

“Hey, you!”

Ako and the man seem to have said something, but who cares!

“Shudaaaaap! Don’t speak, you pervert and you hopeless idiot!”

Venting everything out, I shout at the stunned Ako without the slightest trace of hesitation.

“Ako, you’re my bride, so why are you meeting with some man offline?! I won’t allow it! Even if there’s nothing between us in real life, you’re my bride in-game, after all!”

“Rusian...”

“Do you understand?!”

“Y-Yess!”

Excellent! Nodding, I next turn to the man.

“Listen, this girl’s my bride. I’m not kidding around here, he’s really my bride! Aah, just in the game, though!”

Hugging Ako tightly within my arm, I glare at him.

“Of course, even if I say that, it’s in-game. My virtual bride! Even so, even if it’s in the game, I wouldn’t have married to show her off or on a whim! I love her, I can puff my chest out and say that! Listen here, Ako, I’ll never allow you to go for an offline meeting with another man alone while I still breathe!”

“Rusian...”

Despite squirming in my arm, Ako comes to a stop at my words.

A sense of relief finally escapes me as she looks at me with moist eyes while gripping onto my clothes with both hands.

—No, all the more I can’t accept this man in particular!

“I’ll never let a suspicious bastard on online games for impure reasons have her! You’re over twenty, aren’t you, hurry and get lost before I shout that you’re aiming for a minor!”

I scream while glaring at the man right in front while hugging Ako.

No, to be honest, I’m scared.

Of course I am, I’ve never been in a fight and those after girls like this are often thugs.

Still, but still, I’ll protect my bride. No matter what.

He set his eyes on my gaze, strengthened with that resolve and desperately trying to maintain its tenacity.

The man—the, man. Is that, a man, huh?

Now that I took a good look, something seems off. His hair’s long for a man and it looks like he has makeup on too; heck, he’s not even wearing men’s clothing.



He, for some reason, lets out a sigh with a tired demeanor.

“...Aah... so that was it, I see, I understand now. So Nishimura-kun is Rusian, huh?”

“Aah? What are you say...?

“Calm down, Nishimura, it’s me.”

Even if you tell me that, I wouldn’t know who the—

“.....Saitou, senseii?”

“A proper look could have told you that much, geez.”

After taking a good look, it seems this is Saitou-sensei, the one in charge of our class who we see on a practically daily basis, the one in her twenties and single.

I can’t deny she does look like a guy from a glance from the back with those jeans and that jacket on.

I see, so that’s it. So that’s how it is.

“...Heh, so it’s you, teacher? You’re the one going for my Ako, huh?”

“Eh? Wait, Nishimura-kun, aren’t you still mistaken? Listen, you see, I’m—”

Who cares about those excuses that damned Saitou’s mumbling out? I put more strength into the arms shielding Ako as I hide her from men.

“Hey, Ako, hurry and call the police, there’s a lesbian pervert teacher laying her hands on her own student here, they’re sure to put her in cuffs quick.”

“Wait, wait, wait! I said you’re making a mistake! I only thought about helping out with that Ako girl after you—Rusian—consulted with me over her!”

“What?”

She said something inexplicable yet again.

What is this woman saying? While I cast a look of contempt towards Saitou, Ako mutters in my arms.

“Rusian, it’s her——she’s Nekohime-san.”

“...Huh?”

Nekohime-san, you say... that caring, gentle to everyone, good at games, and cute as well Nekohime-san? Ex-My-Angel Nekohime-san?

That’s that Saitou?

“Yes, that’s correct, I am Nekohime. After the discussion you brought up, Ako-san... Tamaki-san initiated a talk separately, you see—”

“Quiet, shut up, I’m not listening.”

“Eeh?”

That’s Nekohime-san.

Saitou-sensei, who conducts lessons at a leisurely pace despite her current youth and is rumored to have nothing to do with men despite saying how much she wants to get married during lessons, is Nekohime-san.

She’s Nekohime-san. The Nekohime-san who laid her hands on my Ako.

“What a despicable, shitty bastard... to think someone like this is our homeroom teacher...”

“—N-Nishimura-kun?”

That shitty Saitou seems to have said something, but who cares?

No more waiting. I hug Ako as I slowly pull her back and speaks out forcefully.

“Ako, hurry, call the police as fast as you can. She’s definitely going straight into prison, this super-dreadnought class lesbian pervert teacher who not only ends her sentences with ‘nya♪’ in online games to show off her cuteness but also tries to put her grubby hands on her students while pretending to be a G.I.R.L.

“D-D-D-D-Don’t be ridiculous! I’m, I’m!”

“Oh, shut up, you lesbian pervert e-flirt!”

“Don’t shout out those ridiculous things! Please, Tamaki-san, explain! You understand, don’t you?!”

The super-dreadnought class lesbian pervert teacher Saitou turns to speak with Ako.

Ako has been mostly silent beside us squabbling away since earlier.

There, she slowly makes her move.

“...Fufufu, I suppose there’s no other choice now.”

“H-Hey, Ako?”

Ako looks up at me and shows a smile that seems dark somewhere.

“That is correct, that is certainly Nekohime-san who you used to love, Rusian. I called her out, so there is no mistaking that.”

“Ako called out Saitou... no, Nekohime-san? Why would you?”

“That’s because she’s deceiving you.”

Ako-san, whatever could you be saying?

Ako said it like it was only natural, but I don’t get what she means at all.

“Ako? What do you mean?”

“Tamaki-san? Didn’t you say you wanted to consult regarding your boyfriend in the same year?”

“Fufufufufufufufu.”

Murky laughter forces its way out of Ako at our words.

Ako felt warm, hot even, when squeezed within my arms just a moment ago, but she seems to now emit a biting cold aura.

“I knew Nekohime-san was actually female from how her words felt. That’s why, that was why I couldn’t look the other way. After all, what other choice did I have? With Rusian believing more in Nekohime-san rather than me, his wife!”

Ako’s voice was by no means loud. Still, its ominous intensity sent chills down my spine as though it’s driving deep into my chest.

“If he were to find out Nekohime-san was actually female... Rusian might have chosen her, someone else rather than me. I could never stand that. That was why I decided.”

Saying so, Ako takes out a box cutter from her chest.

It shines a dull silver under the neon lights before the station.

Ako grips it tight with both hands and... click, click, click goes the extending blade.

“H-Hey, Ako? What are you planning on doing?”

“T-Tamaki-san?! Taking out something that dangerous on the...”

Hold on, that's not going to end as a mere joke! Knives are no good!

Showing no sign at how flustered we got, Ako speaks with force.

“She's the witch dragging you onto the wrong path, Rusian! That's why! As your true wife! I'll kill that here and now!”

Immediately after those words, Ako forcefully shakes off my arms and charges towards Saitou—or she tried to before I hugged her from behind, holding her back with all I had!

“What are you doing?! Look, that's Saitou! Our school teacher!”

I desperately try to restrain Ako and she resists just as hard, planting her feet firmly on the ground and pointing the box cutter at Saitou.



**“Rusian, move aside! Or I can’t kill her!”**

“I’m telling you, don’t shout out that you’re killing our school teacher! Woah, wait, stop... aah!”

Ako finally leaves my hands and dashes to Saitou-sensei. She holds onto the box cutter as though she would go, “I’ll off you!”, and in return, Saitou-sensei shows no sign of fright.

“Aah, come on... knock it off, you fool!”

Straight after she says that, a short-lived, dull noise rings out as Ako trembles.

A glance shows Saitou’s arm digging horizontally into Ako’s neck—it’s a magnificently executed lariat.

“O-Ohh... bravo.”

“I would rather you not think all gamers are weak and feeble. I was in the wrestling club back in school.”

Saitou-sensei raises her fist grandly as she speaks.

No, well, look, I’m not quite sure about posing so triumphantly after knocking out a student either.

It seems Saitou’s arm that shot out as a counter had the force of Ako’s charge behind it as well, shattering both the girl’s mind and the body powering that mind; Ako’s crouching down with a coughing fit.

“Ako, are you okay?”

“That goes without saying, I went easy on her. Nishimura-kun, bring Tamaki-san along here, let’s make a move. ...Aah, I am

very sorry, it seems these kids have caused quite a scene, ahahahaha.”

Saitou-sensei says so before showing an artificial smile towards the passersby pointing their skeptical gazes from all around. I dash to Ako crouching down and rubs her back.

“Ermm, Ako, you okay?”

“Ughh... how could I lose to...”

Ako continues squatting down as she speaks bitterly.

“You should be relieved from the bottom of your heart that you didn’t win. Rather, it wouldn’t be strange if the police go after you for carrying something this dangerous...”

I pick up the box cutter fallen on the ground and immediately notice something’s off.

It’s light. Also, the knife bit’s completely mangled.

“.....”

Upon touching the box cutter with my finger, the blade easily bends.

“To do something as pointless as to make an elaborate fake cutter from aluminum foil... if it wasn’t me, it would have been a suspension from school.”

“But... Rusian...”

We’re receiving what can only be termed a scolding from Saitou-sensei in the cafe she brought us into.

Ako’s downhearted too, perhaps aware that she went too far.

“I logged in to LA after a long break after talking with Nishimura-kun brought up memories. And then, by coincidence, I heard there’s someone unable to differentiate between the game and reality from Rusian—no, Nishimura-kun. I am a teacher, after all, so I was worried. And that girl just happened to ask for advice from me and even said she’s a student from Maegasaki, so I couldn’t possibly leave that alone. I came all this way, thinking I would be able to personally speak with you.”

It seems that’s how it was.

“If I left things be, Nekohime will take away Rusian, so I thought I could only threaten her in a harmless manner and separate them. But Rusian would never let me if he knew, so I had to say that to anger him purposely and...”

And that seems to be how that was.

What’s with that, so it would have all been fine even if I left everything alone?

“Then, what, could I be the biggest idiot here for acting so frantic?”

“Hmm... it appears you would.”

“Oh, really, hahaha... aah, just kill me.”

My shoulders droop down beside Ako in the same posture.

With her hands on our shoulders, forcefully pulling them up, Saitou-sensei smile widely.

“Now then, it’s time for a scolding for the both of you.”

“Don’t I have nothing to do with this... no, I’m very sorry.”

“Good boy.”

I couldn’t say anything against Saitou-sensei who has a truly, really rare expression on befitting that of a “teacher”.

“Listen, Tamaki-san. Children incapable—no, purposely not separating the Internet and the real world are not too uncommon lately. Deliberately not putting any boundaries between online spaces, such as games or SNSes, and reality and using them as tools for meetups. There are many such children. You’ve made friends that way, too, and school has become more fun. I have no intention of vilifying that.”

“...Yes.”

She speaks, gently delving into Ako’s heart while looking into her eyes.

Ako’s acting timid, but still, she nods while meeting her eyes.

“But you are still a young girl. There’s always a risk. You understand that, don’t you? That is why you should understand the distinctions between the Internet and the real world. You should be showing the same wariness against those you meet online. ...Tamaki-san? Could it be that you’re not mixing up games with the real world, but simply placing too much trust in games?”

She holds Ako’s hand tight as she says that.

Ako’s frame shudders, likely due to the surprise of having her hand held? Or maybe she hit the bullseye.

“Liking the ‘net more than the real world. Liking games more than the real world. Unable to put any trust in the real world but able to trust games. Yes, there’s no problem with that at all. It’s your prerogative to think so. But you see, Tamaki-san, that’s no good when it comes to your body. For example, even if you met some guy online, you can’t not be on your guard in reality. Nishimura-kun just happened to be a good boy this time round and I just happened to actually be female and a teacher, so everything ended on a good note. But if he was someone without that self-control and I was actually a man, your body might have become unfit for marriage about now, you know?”

She points at me as she speaks—wait, what are you saying while I kept quiet?! I would never do that!

“Wait, I wouldn’t have done anything like that!”

“I understand that. It’s just in the worst case scenario, you see.”

I won’t even then, geez.

My eyes happen to turn towards Ako. She’s staring at my face.

“.....”

“.....”

And as we exchange looks, Ako’s cheeks burst into crimson.

Turning down as though embarrassed, she fidgets while shooting glances at me.

“That’s not the right reaction to have here, is it?! Shouldn’t you be turning pale, showing a displeased face, or something to the tune of that?! Why are you going all embarrassed on me?!”

“I mean, we are married, so it’s not completely unthinkable that I wouldn’t have considered about such things as well.”

“Aaaaah, come on! You haven’t understood a single bit of what I went through so much to say, have you, Ako?!”

I scratch my head.

As I thought, she doesn’t get it at all.

So she only said that back then to stop me from meeting Nekohime-san!

Back then—aah, right.

“Geez... hey, Ako.”

“Yes?”

My heart rate speeds up with Ako looking up at me, happy with just being called out to.

Can I say it? Should I say it? I did decide that I will say it the next time we meet.

“Back then, you know, when you asked me what’s different between the game and real life?”

“Ah... yes.”

Ako’s expression suddenly clouds over at my words.

“I thought about it way too much, and they’re completely different. I mean.”

I really can’t look at Ako straight any longer than this.

Lowering my eyes to the coffee cup and averting them from even my face visible on its black surface, I speak.

“I mean, you’re way cuter in real life rather than in-game.”

“\_\_\_\_\_!”

Ako’s face flashes crimson at the edge of my sight.

Woaah, embarrassing. This is super embarrassing.

Maybe I really shouldn’t have said it.

Or rather, I shouldn’t have gone about it in such an embarrassing manner, shouldn’t there be some other way to put it?

I failed, this was definitely a failure!

“R-Rusian.”

“...What is it.”

Ako glances at me, turns away, turns back to me, and repeats—after quite some hesitation, she speaks softly.

“I, when I met you in real life, Rusian—I fell harder, much harder for you.”

“.....I-Is that so?”

“Y-Yes.”

“.....”

“.....”

We both turn away while throwing glances at each other, checking out the other’s reaction.

What’s with this air, it’s no good, hey, can someone please—

“Heey, both of you...? I don’t suppose you remember your teacher here...?”

“Aaah, I’m sorry, I forgot!”

Come to think of it, she is here!

“You forgot... well, guess that’s only natural with the two of you young ones, I guess.”

It looks like her “teacher mode” from earlier has reached its limit as Saitou-sensei returns to her usual impression of a slack teacher before sighing.

“Well, I’m only scolding because I have to, anyway. Just do as you like all you want and take responsibility for it as long as it doesn’t cause any trouble for me.”

“Y-Yay! Look, Rusian, we have permission from the teachers!”

“We did not! You can’t call that receiving permission! Besides, what I said earlier wasn’t like that, so don’t go mistaking anything!”

“No illicit sexual relationships, you hear?”

“Our love is pure, unlike all of those normalfags!”

“Then go ahead!”

Don’t go ahead! Don’t mess with me!

“Teacher, that’s enough messing around!”

“A-Ahaha. I’m sorry, it appears I went too far with the joke, huh?”

She gives a forced laugh and lowers her head at me knocking the table.

Taking a sip of the coffee at her hand, she scrunches up her face at its bitterness and reaches out for the sugar.

“Nn, it’s bitter… Still, I was serious had I said I only had to as a teacher. Personally—right, Nishimura-kun.

“W-What is it?”

She shows an unpleasant grin before looking between Ako and me.

“Do you recall your resistance towards me earlier? You know, the part where you puffed out your chest and shouted out that you love her?”

“Waaah, stop it, please stop it! What are you saying all of a sudden?!”

I-I don’t want to hear it! I frantically cover my ears, but that’s hardly enough to block out their voices.

What’s with you, why would you drag out that memory from a few minutes ago that I’ve decided to file away as the second bit of my dark past?!

“Rusian! I love you too!”

“Thanks, I love you in-game, too, damn it! And what about it?!”

“Now, now, no need to be all angry.”

She smiles as though amused at those words I flung out half in desperation from the continuing embarrassment.

“How should I put this? I doubt you would say that much for a mere in-game friend. The feelings behind those words were certainly intense, you know? So, though I wouldn’t know how you want to express it on the surface, I’m sure Nishimura-kun

does think about Tamaki-san in his own way, don't you think?"

".....That's."

Not true. I personally think it's no use trying to insist that either.

I mean, with a cute girl in the same grade, who I get along well with, going on and on about how she loves me... there's no way I can ignore that, it's only natural!

"But Ako goes too fast. If she were to ask for us to slowly develop our relationship like normal people, I may think otherwise, but she just went on about us being husband and wife from the very beginning..."

"Rusian..."

"That's why, look, how about we take it slow?"

Saitou-sensei pats both Ako and my shoulders with both hands with a bright smile on.

"Tamaki-san, you should take your time and understand too. Nishimura-kun is different from the 'Rusian' you know—but, still, that's lovely in its own way. Nishimura-kun, Tamaki-san's interest in you isn't because you are 'Rusian' either. Take your time and find out, little by little. You are still young, so there's plenty of time. I'll watch over both of you over that time at least."

"...Teacher."

“In the game and in the real world, too. If your love grows in both, it would be simply amazing... wouldn’t you think so too, nya?”

The charm Saitou-sensei exhibited, smiling with those teasing words resemblant of whenever I speak with Nekohime-san in LA, appeared lovely, almost enough for me to believe in those words.

This person may be a surprisingly good teacher, I even thought.

“Aah, it comes as a breath of relief, to hear you say so, teacher.”

It was then.

That elegant speech came from the seats behind her.

“...Erm, eh?”

She spins about. Long, black hair appears in her sight.

“Goshouin Kyou”; at times “Student President”; otherwise “Club President”; or mainly “Master”.

A familiar girl with her familiar appearance.

“Huh, isn’t that you, Master? When did you get here?”

“Almost the very beginning. I watched the entire clamor. My, those were certainly some good fighting words you shouted out, Rusian.”

“Aren’t they! I wanted to record them down for all eternity!”

Ako immediately agrees with Master who spewed out that ludicrous line.

“Don’t be stupid! Rather, forget it already!”

“What are you saying, Rusian? Aren’t you desperately trying to remember the sensation of hugging onto Ako yourself?”

“Like hell I aaamm!”

It isn’t good, she saw us during the worst part! She’s definitely going to poke fun at this forever! Definitely!

While I agonized with a “waaah”, Saitou-sensei observes Master’s expression with a somewhat blue face.

“H-Hello, Goshouin-san? Whatever could you be doing in a place like this?”

“It would take quite some time to tell the whole story. Hence, to state my business here in a single, simple word—that would be to invite.”

“I-Invite?”

Master gives an affirmative nod and walks closer to her side.

“As you have spoken, I, too, am thinking of giving this couple time. I desire for them to think it through slowly. The Modern Communications-Electronics Recreation Club was created for that purpose.”

“?!”

She turns around towards us with an astonished look.

Erm, I’d be troubled even if you’re to look at me like that. I did say I was in the netoge club, didn’t I?

Saitou-sensei's effectively fleeing now, but Master drives her farther.

“But what a pickle we are in. We are on the verge of dissolution due to our lack of an advisor.”

“T-That sounds tough. But how unfortunate, I already handle the Literary Club, so I apologize, but please look for another—”

Drawing closer to her ear as she tried to decline, the president of the Modern Communications-Electronics Recreation Club put on a smile no decent person would wear as she whispers into it.

“—How about reconsidering and accepting it, nya?”

“?!”

Saitou-sensei's frame shudders and turns rigid.

Not letting up on that opening, Master continues her verbal assault.

“A Japanese language teacher who goes by the name, ‘Nekohime’, in online games, adopts a pandering speech by ending her sentences with ‘nya ヾ’, and rejects the rare confession to her by insisting she’s actually male—I, too, would prefer to pretend to be ignorant of that all.

“Wha- A-Are you threatening me?!”

Taking on her shrill words, Master gently caresses her back.

“How could I possibly think of such a thing? This is mutual aid. We are in a troubling situation. And you, teacher, would

prefer to not be in one. Do you not think we would get along just fine?"

That's unfair! That's a really unfair trade! Heck, you're totally threatening her by implying that you'll be troubled if she shakes her head!

"I-If I don't admit it, no one will..."

Master replies with a single line to her moans.

"I have a recording of the incident in front of the station."

"A-Aah... aaaaahh...."

Saitou-sensei surrenders with a cry of despair.

"That's horrible, it's too much..."

"There's no helping it, though? In the end, we didn't settle anything and we can't let the club end like this either, can we?"

I turn my sight towards the source of that voice and see Schw's face peeking from behind Master.

"Huh, Schw. You're here too?"

"Don't call me Schw. She'll find out I'm a gamer, won't she?"

That's been exposed since ages ago—guess I'll keep that to myself, she'll be hurt if I say it.

"Don't mind it, I mean, she's one too. Besides, we're persuading her to be our advisor right now, anyway."

"...Persuade? That?"

Schw says doubtfully, looking at Master smiling and Saitou-sensei turning pale.

With regards to that, I will prefer to maintain a “no comment” stance as well.

“Now we get to all play games together again!”

Ako simply cheers regardless of our respective thoughts. Aah, so our teacher’s sacrifice lies behind that innocent smile?

“—Fine.”

And after breaking in the end, she speaks to Master.

“But I have a single condition.”

“Let us hear it.”

“That would be for—”

“—Very well, naturally, we would not mind.”

Master shows a satisfied smile and accepts her condition.

And the Modern Communications-Electronics Recreation Club’s continued existence was extended for the time being.

#### Localization / Translation Notes

#### “Nekohime Hunter Frontier”

From “Monster Hunter Frontier Online”. ([more info](#))

#### “Saba”

Written as 「鯖」 (saba) which means “mackerel”.

In Japanese, server (saabaa) and mackerel (saba) are homophones.

And the latter is easier to type, so... ([more info](#))

## “Ikan-no-I”

A (fictional) ballistic missile.

Can be interpreted as “feelings of regret” (likely in reference to usual statements issued by the Japanese government). ([more info](#))

## “It’s time for us to leave all login games in the dust!”

「すべての RPG を過去にする」 originates from the catch copy for Phantasy Star Universe.

It ended up “leaving all RPGs in the dust”, though not in a positive sense, with its bad reception. ([more info](#))

## “Ichiro Onrhein, Castle Onrhein, and from the Western side, Didooon Bon Onrhein”

Refers to related memes from Phantasy Star Universe, Master of Epic, and Monster Hunter Frontier respectively.

Connectivity issues after PSU’s release displayed an error code, “No.51”, which coincided with the uniform number of the major leaguer, Ichiro Suzuki.

MoE’s release resulted in login issues due to server load, with the login screen featuring a castle atop a lake.

This prompted memes about being able to log in only after crushing the castle.

MHF’s release resulted in server load as well, with the login sound effect essentially going *didooon* before Windows pops up an error prompt announcing the login failure and causing the *bon*.

([more info \(Ichiro\)](#), [more info \(Castle\)](#), [more info \(Didooon Bon\)](#))

## “Minmei Publishing”

A fictional publisher from Sakigake!! Otokojuku. ([more info](#))

## “Simple 1200 game: ‘*THE Login*’”

A series of numbered budget-priced console games. ([more info](#))

## “Stop attacking my reason directly! It’s never happening!

**My life points dropped to zero a long time ago!”**

A scene from Yu-Gi-Oh! where Yugi uses a combo that allows him to attack multiple times in a turn, ending in him overkilling his opponent (several times) which became a meme with many parody videos. ([more info](#))

## “desire sensor”

“A gamer superstition. The Desire Sensor detects what rare item, or event you are farming for, and prevents the game from giving it to you.” -Urban Dictionary ([more info](#))

## “Burontism”

The following line originates from a FFXI player named “Buront”.

“not even I can hold back my anger from reaching rapture” ([more info](#))

## “Rusian, move aside! Or I can’t kill her!”

A line from an infamous Ragnarok Online incident.

The players involved are tentatively named “374” (from the post number in the thread the story was posted in), “S Prefecture Tsukimiya” (referred henceforth as SPT; lives in that particular area and speculated to own that character

named after Tsukimiya Ayu), and “Ako” (from “acolyte”, a class in RO).

SPT, a girl in middle school who’s not quite right in the head, believes herself to be 374’s little sister and that they were so since their past lives. She also believes they are fated to be separated due to a curse from a witch (Ako) long ago. After a series of events involving stalking (SPT finding 374’s phone number and apartment location), illegal trespassing (SPT breaking down 374’s door with a baton-like object), the police (arresting SPT with a patrol car), and her other generally delusional actions, it culminated in the following scene involving all three of them (translated from the linked page):

As they approached a low traffic residential area while chatting, **Ako groans as she fell**. Thinking she was dead drunk, 374 frantically turned towards Ako, but **the one there was SPT with a baton hanging from her right hand**. “**Are you okay, onii-chan?**”, she asked, but with 374 who was momentarily stunned **ignoring her**, she started saying lines like, “**Onii-chan, isn’t that the witch? I mean, you were calling out the witch’s name.**” 374 **ignored these as well** and confirmed “Can you move?” with Ako who was still down and holding onto her left arm. Upon seeing that, SPT went, “**I’ll kill her this instant.**” before **swinging the baton at 374**. And when 374 shielded with the bag he held,

**“ONII-CHAN, MOVE ASIDE! OR I CAN’T KILL HER!”**, SPT screamed. 374 **trembled with fear** and freezes from her menacing look, but Ako abruptly got up and slammed a lariat

into SPT. Receiving a direct hit from that right arm in her neck, **SPT (an underdeveloped girl in middle school)** was knocked out with that one hit. Since Ako **held onto her arm once more as she fell**, 374 subdued SPT alone after calling in the police. SPT shouted, **“You’ll be killed by the witch! Help me, onii-chan!”** until the very end.

([more info](#), [more info](#))

## Perfect World

Translation of Netoge no Yome wa Onnanoko ja nai to Omotta?’s volume 1, epilogue.

A translation and localization note is available at the bottom, but try to finish the chapter before that.

“ternoon.”

The cool air flooding the clubroom hits me after I loudly slide the door open. This feels like enough of a reason to come here in itself.

“So you have arrived, Rusian? It is about time for the regular maintenance to end. Our activity for today is to conquer the quests in the new update as quickly as possible, settle your preparations.”

Master, who was already waiting inside, is haughtily crossing her arms with the computer in front of her switched on.

“I’ll be late dealing with Ako, anyway, so it’s not like it’s going to end quick or anything.”

“Then you will simply have to settle her preparations as well. That is only part of the job scope as her husband.”

“...Got it.”

Without bothering to prod at how Master said it, I switch on Ako’s computer along with mine.

I decided to not get overly flustered with regards to Ako. Like how Ako’s too impatient, I may have been too particular about that too. Rather than squabbling from different viewpoints, we should be tending towards each other little by little and eventually share a single. One slow, gentle step after another.

The computers start up with a deep whirling noise.

Ako and I are the only ones who know her password.

By the way, the password’s “rusian aka love eternity”... ugh, I seriously don’t want to enter that in.

I hear the clubroom’s door opens as I key that in.

“Aah, it’s so cool! I’m only in this pointless club just for this, seriously.”

“Good afternoon~”

“Yo, good job.”

The ones entering are Segawa, her eyes partly closed as she basks in the cold air, and Ako, staggering along in exhaustion.

It’s still Monday, the first day of the week. It’s nowhere near that tiring normally, but that fact’s of no significance to Ako.

“Ugh, I wanna take a break from school... can’t I just come for the club...?”

“Give up on that, we did promise our advisor, Saitou-sensei.”

“Ughhh.”

The condition Saitou-sensei gave is, “Ensure all members of the Modern Communications-Electronics Recreation Club attend school as often as possible”.

“There are those who skip out on school from being too engrossed in online games, so...”

She was certainly the very image of Nekohime-san, considerate of others as always, when she gave those words and that condition.

And, as a result.

“No more school... I don’t want to do anything but play the rest of my life...”

“Why are you that exhausted simply by coming to school?”

“But you seee...”

Ako’s drained as you can see.

I can’t deny there’s a part of me that pities her, but I definitely don’t think this is bad for her.

We had, on a near daily basis, met up, fought, adventured, played, talked, and slowly bonded together in the game. If Ako were to come to school every day, she should be able to make more friends aside from us eventually.

“Ako, did you make any friends in your class?”

“There’s no way I’ll succeed in making an item at S-rank difficulty like a friend!”

“They’re items to you? Hey, now.”

S-She should. Definitely, probably.

“How about trying a little harder, you can deal with light conversation at least, can’t you?”

“I have no points in the Ordinary Conversation skill, I threw them all into Meme Conversation, so.”

“T-This girl’s just...”

Yeah, this may be impossible.

Sealing the slight resignation into my chest, I turn to the computers.

Ako totters to the desk by my side and sits down before her face lights up with a smile upon seeing the monitor that’s already turned on.

“Ah, it’s up! Thank you, Rusian!”

“I request a change in your password.”

“Fufufu, no way.”

“You’re pointlessly stubborn only on these things...”

Despite her usual meek nature, she’s only selfish on these trivial times. How can I not overlook that? Darn it.

While feeling somewhat henpecked, I start up LA’s client. I don’t know the details for the new quests yet, but if I’m bringing Ako along while she teeters about and gets lost, I better know them well.

“Ah, Rusian, mind if I ask you a little something?”

“What’s up?”

I randomly reply to Ako’s nonchalant words. Ako continues like she would in a casual conversation.

“Actually, my parents will surprisingly be returning home early today. So, I was, you know, thinking of introducing you to them, Rusian.”

“Yeah, that’s... that’s... erm, what?”

“Like I said, won’t you have dinner at my home tonight?”

...Why? What happened to lead things to this conclusion? Rather, why are you able to say that out so casually? That’s like passing down a death sentence to me, you know?

“I request a detailed explanation on how you arrived at that proposal.”

“I mean, see, we’re married, aren’t we? After considering that, greeting them now can be said to be too late by now.

“No way, I’m not going! I refuse! Games and real life are different!”

“Please comeee. My parents are part of those things you definitely wouldn’t have known from just in the game, too, aren’t they?”

That logic’s screwed up!

That’s definitely not what I was trying to tell you, Ako!

“Wait, wait, wait, why do I have to suffer through being introduced to your parents just from an in-game marriage?!”

“Ah, I’ll be making dinner with mother, so Rusian, if you could please talk things over with father in the meantime...”

“Who would be glad about such a situation?! This is on purpose, right?! You’re doing this on purpose, aren’t you?!”

I hug my head with a *waaah* as the pair listening in grin.

“Rusian’s misfortune is exquisite.”

“Such schadenfreude!”

“Hey, you loooott!”

The pair averts their eyes from me raging in anger.

And the last, remaining person smiles brightly as she grabs onto my arm.

“That’s it, how about we go ahead and marry in real life too? It would make things really easy, won’t it?”

“We won’t!”

“It’s a rare opportunity, so let’s settle the greeting-the-parents part today!”

“I’m good, there’s no need to let me have their daughter’s hand!”

“Please allow me to take your son’s hand in marriage!”

“You’re planning on invading my home?!”

She goes only at her own pace, won’t listen to me, says stupid things all the time, and yet apparently loves me from what she claims—this girl is undeniably, “my bride”.

#### Localization / Translation Notes

#### **“Perfect World -3D World-“**

From “Perfect World”, a MMO’s title. The Japanese title of the game is 「パーフェクトワールド -完美世界-」 (essentially saying “Perfect

World" twice)  
([more info](#))

## Afterword

Translation of Netoge no Yome wa Onnanoko ja nai to Omotta?'s volume 1, afterword.

A translation and localization note is available at the bottom, but try to finish the chapter before that.

### **Excuse me for shouting.**

Nice to meet you. Or maybe, it's been a while.

I am Kineko Shibai.

Thank you very much for picking up this work, "Netoge no Yome wa Onnanoko ja nai to Omotta?" on this occasion.

I wanna write a story about online games! Playing online games on a daily basis is a major reason in leading to that thought and this volume is filled with that particular passion of the author.

If it gave you a slight smile, comprehension, agreement, nostalgia, or just allowed you a brief period of enjoyment in some form, I wish for nothing more.

Thank you very much for reading this far.

Now, this is a personal matter, but actually, I had married in an online game before myself.

On the topic of the one who was "my bride", she played a female character but cheated on me with another female character and divorced me.

I cannot deny it created a trauma that lasts to this day.

### **Excuse me for the shouting.**

And so, leaving the chatter on that note, here are the thank-yous and such.

Hisasi-san who drew the illustrations. It should be kind of like this—I thank you from the bottom of my heart for drawing those characters I could only describe so vaguely in such an adorable manner. Thank you very much.

To the editor-in-charge who stuck with me so patiently through my fuzzy thoughts over the story's direction, thank you very much this time as well. I believe I will be troubling you much more from now on too, so I will be in your care.

And to those who I have played online games with up until now, and the many who likely do not know I am like this, thank you to all of you.

And thank you to everyone who picked up this book. I hope to create a world as fun as those within games, so I hope for your support.

Now then, I hope we may meet again.

Kineko Shibai

#### **Localization / Translation Notes**

**“Excuse me for shouting. / Excuse me for the shouting.”**

Lines used in FFXI to (pointlessly) politely denote that

someone will be shouting, thereby giving a (mostly useless) warning before flooding the nearby players' chatlogs.  
[\(more info\)](#), [more info](#))